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Marie Antoinette

QUEEN OF FRANCE

WOMAN IN FRANCE

DURING THE

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

21408

BY

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WITH EIGHT PORTRAITS.

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PERIOD THE FIRST.

THE REGENCY.

WOMAN IN FRANCE,

DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS —STATE OF FRENCH SOCIETY AT THE CLOSE OF LOUIS THE FOURTEENTH'S REIGN.

In times still recent, in a nation celebrated for its power and greatness, and in an age which gave to thought a vast and magnificent, even though perilous, development, a series of most remarkable women exercised a power so extensive, and yet so complete, as to be unparalleled in the history of their sex.

They ruled society, as women of the world; the empire of letters, as patronesses of the fine arts; the state, as favourites and advisers of kings. They gave the tone to feeling, philosophy, and thought. Their caprice made wars, and signed treaties of peace. They hastened the fall of a Monarchy, and the outbreak of the greatest Revolution of modern times. They could attempt to check or direct that Revolution in its rapid and fearful course; they shared to the fullest extent its errors, its crimes, and its heroic virtues. They suffered from its proscriptions like men, because like men they had striven; and when their failing power seemed at its last ebb, it was still a woman who overthrew Robespierre, a woman who raised a solitary voice against the despotism of Napoleon.

This power was not always pure or good: it was often

corrupt in its source, evil and fatal in its results; but it was power. Though the historians of the period have never fully or willingly acknowledged its existence, their silence cannot efface that which has been; and without that rule of woman, so reluctantly recognised, many of their pages of statesman's policy, court intrigue, civil strife, or foreign war, need never have been written. To this remarkable feature of modern history, to the analysis of the power of Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century, the present work is devoted.

We shall trace the progress of direct female influence, from the aged and severe Madame de Maintenon deserting the deathbed of Louis XIV. to the lovely and hapless Marie Antoinette ascending the scaffold of the Revolution. We shall mark Woman's social rule extending from princesses and favourites, like Madame du Maine and Madame de Pompadour, to literary and noble ladies like the nun Tencin, Madame du Chatelet, the mistress of Voltaire, and Madame du Deffand, the friend of Walpole. From these, again, we shall see it descending to the heroines of the Bourgeoisie and the Revolution, Madame Roland and Madame Tallien.

It was chiefly in the eighteenth century that women exercised, to its fullest extent, the great and remarkable influence they always possessed in France. They were allowed no political rights, but society gave them the power denied by law. That power was paramount in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It had far more reality and truth than the idolatrous homage they received during the Middle Ages. Woman was then a being to be idealised and illustrated by fervent strains and chivalrous deeds; but neither Paladin nor Troubadour submitted in reality to her abstract sway. Woman has seldom less true power than when the admiration and love of man are granted merely to her beauty and defenceless state. Such as it was, this influence tended, however, to modify the national character; to which it imparted that chivalrous gallantry and elegance, not unmixed with frivolousness, by which it was long distinguished.

The progress of civilisation, which raised the moral and

intellectual standard of woman, naturally extended her power. Towards the close of the Middle Ages, and the beginning of a new era, we find her everywhere entering actively into the political and religious struggles which marked the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This influence was increased in France by the three Queens-Regent, Catherine of Medici, Mary, her niece, and Anne of Austria. Woman now ostensibly took the lead in every intrigue. The wars of the Fronde, with Anne of Austria on one side, and on the other the haughty Mademoiselle de Montpensier, or the beautiful Duchess of Longueville, who made tools of Condé and Turenne, effectually distracted the kingdom during the minority of Louis XIV. When peace had succeeded to those troubled times, the celebrated soirées of the Hôtel Rambouillet, presided over by the fair Julie d'Angennes, Mademoiselle de Scudéri, Madame de Sévigné, and Madame de Lafayette, gave a new impulse to the literature of the day. Later still, the witty and accomplished, though profligate, Madame de Montespan, and her insinuating successor, Madame de Maintenon, can almost be said to have governed France under the name of the Grand Monarque.

This power was the more important, that, for the greatest portion of his life, Louis XIV. completely ruled French society. His tastes for magnificence and war were the tastes of the nation. They gave to his government new power and new strength; so that he could exclaim, with equal pride and truth, "L'état c'est moi." This despotic sway prepared, by its unity, the future greatness of France; but it extinguished patriotism, by rendering the country subordinate to the sovereign's personal honour and glory. Each change of the monarch's mood altered the aspect of his court; and, if he governed Versailles, Versailles governed France. It was, therefore, only through Louis himself that women could rule. The influence of his mistresses was personal, like their lover's government. Through him, these highly-born and accomplished, though not very virtuous ladies, impressed their own character and spirit on the times in which they lived. In order to please

Mademoiselle de la Vallière, the chivalrous amusements of the Middle Ages were resumed at court; satire and intrigue prospered under Madame de Montespan; asceticism and rigid devotion marked the sway of Madame de Maintenon.

The opening of the eighteenth century, which gave more force and freedom to woman's power, also beheld the close of Louis XIV.'s reign. That long and imperious sway, which had united all the magnificence and glories of art to the most absolute despotism, was passing away in sadness and austerity. The couriers, who formerly brought tidings of victory won, now told of heavy reverses and lost battles. The nation, drained of its resources to satisfy one man's ambition and pride, was evidently on the brink of bankruptcy. The gay and royal revels of the court had vanished, before vigils, fasts, and penitential gloom. More than monastic silence and seclusion shrouded the splendours of Versailles. The king no longer listened to the stately tragedies of Racine, or to the gay comedies of Molière, surrounded by a host of beautiful women and courtly nobles. Apart, in a gloomy and retired chamber, he sat, between his confessor and the withered Madame de Maintenon, a feeble, querulous, but still despotic, old man, who vainly sought to impart his own melancholy asceticism to France.

The court and nation rebelled against the power to which they had submitted so long. Louis XIV. saw, with indignation and dismay, that his influence was no longer acknowledged; that, though he had grown penitent and devout, the world still remained unconverted, and chose to indulge in those follies of youth over which he now mourned in his old age. Deep homage surrounded him still: but where was the reality of that homage? An irrepressible longing for a new and younger reign was abroad. This spirit of innovation was odious to the old monarch; not only because it anticipated his death, but, still more, because it threatened to destroy the labours of his whole existence. He knew that the princes of the blood only waited his decease in order to assert their long-restrained freedom. His grandson, the Duke of Burgundy,

the heir of his absolute power—a grave, religious prince, pupil of Fénélon—spoke of the rights of the people, and of the duties of monarchs. The duchess, his wife, a gay and graceful princess, hinted that the pleasures of the new court would compensate for the gloom of the old one. The young Duke of Orleans, the future Regent of France, condemned to inactivity through the jealousy of his uncle, avenged himself by braving his power. Gathering around him a circle of licentious nobles, he carried on with them the grossest orgies, in which the names of the monarch and Madame de Maintenon were uttered with sarcasm and scorn. The Prince and Princess of Conti affected to treat with familiar freedom the authors whom their independence of thought and speech rendered obnoxious to the king. Defying the prejudice against authorship, the princess took the character of a literary woman.* Her sister, Madame du Maine, wife of the sovereign's eldest legitimised son, shunned the gloomy court of her father-in-law. She made her delightful residence at Sceaux the resort of the wits of the day. A constant interchange of epigrams, madrigals, and poetical epistles, was carried on between the guests and their princely hostess, who daily acted the comedies of Molière and the tragedies of Racine with Baron the actor; thus violating the strict etiquette introduced by Louis XIV. as the safeguard of royalty.

The monarch vainly sought to check this spirit of weariness and ennui at his protracted reign. It pervaded even his own family circle. The eldest Princess of Conti, his daughter by Mademoiselle de la Vallière, ridiculed him and Madame de Maintenon in her private letters. Her sister, Mademoiselle de Nantes, Duchess of Bourbon, and celebrated, like her mother, Madame de Montespan, for her beauty and satirical wit, lamented, in petulant effusions, the fate of youth and beauty compelled to reside among the old pedants of an antiquated court. With more candour than charity she exclaimed :—

* She translated into French Pope's "Rape of the Lock."

"Ah! qu'une vieille cour est hideuse!
On n'y parle jamais ni d'amour ni d'amans;
Qu'une princesse est malheureuse
D'y passer ses plus jeunes ans!
Que c'est une chose ennuyeuse
De ne voir que de vieux pédants!"

Such epigrams and *noëls* then enjoyed extreme popularity. Both courtiers and people felt avenged when they could laugh at the common oppressor. The police watched and punished in vain. The thought of a nation will ever assert its freedom. Supple as they were by nature, the courtiers could not always disguise their real feelings. The witty Madame de Caylus, niece of Madame de Maintenon, being exiled from Versailles for having ridiculed the devout party, frankly exclaimed, on receiving the order of her banishment, "that the ennui felt at court rendered it the real place of exile." Madame de Maintenon herself was overpowered with the dulness of this vast prison-house. "Ah!" said she to a friend who seemed to envy her proud destiny, "if you knew what it is to have to amuse a man whom nothing can amuse!"

The faded glory of his reign, the gloom and reverses which darkened its close, the impatience of the new generation, the ill-concealed ennui of his children and friends,—all told Louis XIV., with a significance and eloquence he could not misunderstand, that his sway had lasted too long; that it was time for him to depart. But the old king resisted this charge with all the strength of his despotic will. If he could not create religious feeling, he at least exacted hypocrisy. A royal guard, on duty in the chapel at Versailles, desirous of amusing himself at the expense of the court ladies, one day declared in their presence that his majesty did not intend assisting at the religious service then going to take place. The ladies, wisely concluding that if the king was not to be present their devotion would be very uselessly thrown away, dropped off, one by one. Louis XIV. came as usual, and was amazed to see the chapel empty, until the guard informed him of his mischievous trick. A large party at court did not, however, choose to practise this restraint: the young and profligate

nobles gathered around the Duke of Orleans, and gloried in the opprobrious name of "roués." Two parties were thus in presence: one, consisting chiefly of superannuated libertines, gave itself up to all the austerities of seeming devotion; whilst the other, which counted in its ranks the sons and daughters of these hollow devotees—the youth and flower of the nobility, revelled in the grossest and most open licentiousness.

Louis XIV. vainly sought to restore France to her ancient faith; her lips professed it still, but incredulity was in her heart. The profligacy of the higher clergy, and the narrow-mindedness of the Jansenists—those Puritans of Catholicism—had alike been fatal to religion. Atheism prevailed,—not indeed under the form of that daring philosophy of later times, which left no mystery unscrutinised, and no destructive argument untold,—but as a great and lamentable want of faith; because faith was worn out and exhausted. "Why, people laugh at everything here!" said the young Duchess of Burgundy, when she came to the court of France. The naïve remark expresses admirably the nature of the scepticism of the period. Mere mockery!—no more!

This Epicurean creed was first propagated by the profligate and indolent aristocracy. The stern rule of Richelieu had broken their chivalrous spirit with the ancient feudal power from which it sprang. They left their old ancestral halls for the palaces of kings: from haughty vassals they became servile courtiers. They were despised by the absolute monarch, as dependants on his favour and will; and by the oppressed people, as a class loaded with privileges and wealth, but without power. The sense of self-dignity and honour faded away from them: they gloried in their vices; cheated at cards, and confessed it. Fontenelle wished to prevent the publication of Hamilton's "Memoirs of De Grammont," in order to spare the hero whose dishonesty they exposed. De Grammont, who had received 1500 livres for the manuscript, hastened to remove the impediment. As if to render rank and title more contemptible still, the minister, Pont Chartrain, had made

them both saleable. For two thousand crowns a roturier might become a gentilhomme. Heavy taxes were laid on the letters-patent of nobility; for the vanity of the financiers who wished to become noble, rendered this a profitable branch of revenue. To such an extent was this practice carried, that a large body of men had no other occupation than to provide arms and genealogies for the new nobility. This second-rate aristocracy was, like the old, exempt from taxation. The Celestins, a religious house of Paris, accordingly purchased the office of secretary to the king, which conferred nobility, and freed them from the taille. Thus the people, on whom rested the real burden of supporting the nation, were oppressed by both rank and wealth. The nobles, whilst they hated the plebeian intruders into their order, married their richly-dowered daughters; protesting, however, like Madame de Grignan, "that they were only manuring their barren ancestral lands, in order to render them once more fertile." But the truth was, that the aristocracy felt the power, so long granted to rank and chivalrous honour, now passing over to wealth and practical intelligence. The wealthy bourgeoisie remained for some time unconscious of their own importance; before which even the haughty Louis XIV. was compelled to bow. Samuel Bernard, the rich Jewish traitant, having refused to grant a large loan required by the minister Des Marets, was presented to the king at Marly, and shewn over the palace by the monarch; who paid him such flattering marks of distinction, that the vain and elated financier immediately gave his consent to the required agreement.

Half a century later, all the seductions of the Grand Monarque would have failed in producing such a result; but the financiers still occupied an inferior position in society: they were striving to win their place; they had not won it. With all their extravagance and pride, they lacked the polish and elegance of the aristocrats, through whom they, the men of the people, were connected with the first families of the realm. Their activity and ambition tended to supply these deficiencies. They attained rank and power; whilst the

nobles, too proud to stoop to scientific and literary pursuits, remained in a state of luxurious indolence, which justified the bitter definition of Montesquieu, — "A lord is a man who sees the king, speaks to the minister, has ancestors, debts, and pensions."

But if men were thus inactive and powerless, women were not. The same Montesquieu declared, "that the individual who would attempt to judge of the government by the men at the head of affairs, and not by the women who swayed those men, would fall into the same error as he who judges of a machine by its outward action, and not by its secret springs." Women were indeed already exercising that great power, which attained its full development towards the middle of the century. They eagerly seized on influence, whatever the means of influence might be. They had received from their male relatives a shameless example of profligacy, which they were not slow to follow. When women fall, they fall deeper than men, because the only sense of honour allowed them by society departs, if once the purity of their lives is tainted. The abandoned conduct of ladies of rank threw a great reproach on their order. It created doubts on the legitimacy of the most noble families, and scandalised the people who lived apart in patriarchal austerity. The corrupting tendency of a despotic government had reached the women who lived beneath its sway. The men, deprived of political rights, used their female friends as the means of their ambition. Indirect power is necessarily immoral: when exercised by women, it is still more so. At the times of which we speak, a spirit of ambition and intrigue, not pure in its origin or purely exercised, seemed to have seized on the whole sex. The persevering ambition of the widow of the burlesque poet, Scarron, had made her Queen of France, in all save name. Her friend, Madame Guyon, attempted to found a religious sect, and caused the long quarrel between Bossuet and Fénélon, which ended in the exile of the latter. Whilst apparently wrapt in the gaieties of Sceaux, Madame du Maine plotted and schemed for the aggrandisement of her husband; one of

her chief agents being her clever femme de chambre, Mademoiselle de Launay. Ladies who had nothing better to do, and no surer means of making a fortune, turned their hotels into gambling-houses, from which they derived a large and infamous revenue. Others conscientiously devoted themselves to the education of the young noblesse. The youthful De Fronsac, so well known for his intrigues under the name Richelieu, was early taught, by Madame de Brancas, to write billets-doux which he could never spell, make imaginary assignations, feign love, jealousy, and all the other appearances of the tender passion. Thanks to this early and judicious teaching, his father was compelled to send him to the Bastile in the fifteenth year of his age.

Some women intrigued without any definite object; for the mere pleasure of intriguing, and because their over-active minds needed exertion. Of these was an obscure lady named Mademoiselle de la Chausseraie. Without rank, wealth, or beauty, concealing her consummate tact under an air of naïve simplicity, she yet exercised a great and occult power. She served people whom she had never seen, for whose gratitude she did not care, and who never felt any gratitude for her. She was feared by the ministers, she often upset Madame de Maintenon's most deeply-laid schemes, and, without creating even a suspicion in his mind, she had the art of influencing the decisions of Louis XIV.

Being one day in the salon of Madame de Ventadour, she learned, by accident, that Letellier, the king's Jesuit confessor, was to obtain from the monarch an order to arrest the Cardinal of Noailles, a Jansenist, on the following morning. Determined that this should not be, she immediately proceeded to Versailles, and, being introduced into the presence of the king, according to the privilege he had granted her, observed, with her usual bonhomie, that his majesty looked unwell and annoyed, probably by some new priest's quarrel. She then dropped a few hints on the expediency of letting the Jesuits and Jansenists settle their own dissensions, and of preserving, above all things, a health so invaluable to the kingdom.

The king was so struck with this reasoning, and especially with that portion of it relative to his health, that, when Letellier asked him the next morning for the order to arrest the cardinal, he drily informed him he had altered his mind, and wished to hear no more on the subject. Thus was the coup d'état, so long prepared by Madame de Maintenon and the confessor, wholly overthrown. In relating this anecdote to a friend, several years after the death of Louis XIV., Mademoiselle de la Chausseraie confessed that she only retained her power over the monarch's mind by assuming an appearance of such simplicity, and even stupidity, that he never suspected the measures he adopted to have arisen from her apparently careless suggestions. She acknowledged at the same time, that the mental exertion necessary to maintain this constant dissimulation often left her overpowered with fatigue.

There was nothing likely to purify or exalt the female character in influence so exercised; we accordingly find few of the women, who possessed any power, remarkable for moral excellence. Their intellect, from not being allowed a free scope, was perverted to evil ends. The prejudice against female authorship, in persons of high rank, was still so strong, that the amiable and accomplished Marchioness of Lambert would never allow her productions to be published. It was only by manuscript copies, obtained from her friends, that the booksellers could succeed in printing them; and on one occasion she bought back the whole edition. This prejudice, as Madame de Lambert observed herself, acted injudiciously on the female character. The ridicule which Boileau and Molière had cast on all female writers was more prejudicial still. Many women, who might have spent their time in an agreeable and at least harmless manner, supposing their writings to possess little merit, were thrown back on intrigue for an occupation. The idleness to which noble women were, like all persons of their rank, reduced, added to their degradation and heartlessness. Notwithstanding, however, the general profligacy, the *convenances* were still strictly observed. Any high-

born lady, chiefly known for the irregularity of conduct, could, like Madame de Parabère, the mistress of the Regent, act the part of a heoric and devoted wife. If her husband was attacked with the small-pox, then so fatal, she made her will, bade her relations farewell, and became the patient's nurse; her own life often being the price of this sacrifice to vanity and ostentation: when, like Madame de Parabère, she was so fortunate as to survive the trial, she did not fail, as soon as it was over, to return to her intrigues; whilst the world still rang with praise, which all knew to be as false and hollow as this seeming devotedness.

Besides the individual power of intrigue, there was another power, higher still, far more effectual, and on which women had the tact to seize at once. We allude to the influence literature already conferred.

In consequence of the gloomy tastes of the monarch, of the weakness of the clergy, of the indolent profligacy of the nobles, and of the coarseness of the wealthy bourgeois, the real social power had become transferred to literature; which, in its turn, was considerably modified by the women of the day. During almost the whole of the eighteenth century, France was in a state of political repose. Thinkers were the only active men; their power was necessarily great. When the body is at rest, the mind must work. Those thinkers submitted, however, to the influence of woman, because their activity was purely mental. They were men of theory, who, whilst they ruined the social edifice, left to others the task of active destruction. The spirit of antagonism, which then pervaded every class, was the reason that, though so often persecuted and contemned by their contemporaries, the French writers of the eighteenth century, nevertheless, retained their influence over them to the last. Though it gave birth to so many remarkable productions, the seventeenth century had not granted a similar power to its literature. There was then more of abstract art, and less of active thought, than in the following period. The patronage of Louis XIV. shackled literary freedom. His praises and pensions silenced genius

more effectually than persecution. This conduct was not, however, the result of policy. The great power of the press, as a vehicle for political and philosophical opinions, was still unsuspected in France. The satires of Boileau and the comedies of Molière were directed against the vices of society, not against society itself: "Tartuffe," Molière's boldest effort, was openly sanctioned by the king. The change which the succeeding century wrought in the influence of literature extended to society. Men of every class felt the want of mingling more freely together; the author emerged from his study and appeared in the fashionable world, to which he imparted some of his own gravity of thought, whilst he acquired an ease and polish hitherto foreign to him.

The action of literary men on society was chiefly exercised through the women, in whose select assemblies they were admitted, and who naturally influenced their views, and their mode of expressing them. This is an important fact; for, though less politically great than in the preceding century, France was then acknowledged to be the focus of European intelligence. Her philosophers, her literary and scientific men, interpreted the feelings and opinions of the age; to which their daring scepticism and satirical raillery soon gave the prevailing tone. She no longer owed her preponderance over other nations to the personal character of her monarch; for the hand that swayed her was vacillating and weak: her greatness was not political, but social and intellectual: her power was that of ideas, and it proved more great and extensive than the warlike despotism of Louis XIV. M. Guizot judiciously remarks, in his "History of Civilisation," that "the power which France possesses of imparting her own feelings and ideas to other nations, does not spring from the originality of those ideas, which are often borrowed, but from the sociable and communicative character of the people." To this we may add, that for this characteristic France is chiefly indebted to her women, and their influence in society. This was especially the case in the last century, when their power was so great that Schlosser has not hesitated to compare it to

that exercised by Richelieu and Colbert over their own times. This is almost equivalent to saying that it was unbounded.

Women owed this power to the want of political liberty. This want was not greater than in the preceding century; but the wish for freedom had increased. The salons over which they presided were the only places where what could not have been published, without the prospect of the Bastile, might be spoken with comparative impunity. This is why the influence of woman can so clearly be traced through all the philosophy and literature of the eighteenth century. That graceful brilliancy of style—the light, frivolous mask, which concealed such destructive features—clearly belong to her, and to that conversational power fostered beneath her care, under the name of causerie; so distinctive, in itself, of the times and of the national character.

It was, however, at a much later period that literature acquired this great influence in France. Voltaire was still unknown under Louis XIV.; Fontenelle's cautious scepticism only paved the way for bolder attacks on creeds and doctrines; Lesage merely aimed at the reformation of manners, and, in portraying his contemporaries, he left a lamentable picture of their total want of moral sense. A few literary societies, nevertheless, existed: that of Madame du Maine was brilliant, social, literary, and political. It answered her taste for wit and her ambitious designs.

Old Ninon de l'Enclos, once so celebrated for her beauty and Epicurean philosophy, and still known by her wit, also gathered around her some of the most eminent men of the day, who met to rail, with more decency, however, than was displayed in the abodes of princesses, at what the world still respected outwardly. There might have been seen J. B. Rousseau, the poet; the gay Abbé de Chaulieu; Fontenelle, whose easy philosophy marked the transition between the two centuries; Chateauneuf, the ancient admirer of the once young and beautiful hostess; and a child named Arouet, who grew up in these sceptical and corrupt assemblies, and who afterwards transferred their immoral and irreligious doctrines

to his writings, in the purest and most elegant French ever written since the seventeenth century.

A spirit of discontent and a defiance of authority characterised these coteries. Authors now no longer depended on haughty patrons: they were courted by society itself; and yet their irritable pride was constantly wounded by new slights, reminding them of their former subordinate position. Keenly alive to evils from which they suffered, and to all of evil that they saw, they attacked, without much mercy, whatever they thought worthy of being condemned. Their attacks were in accordance with the spirit of the times. Vague ideas of freedom were already abroad. The English revolution of 1688 produced a deep and lasting impression in France. Many began to wonder why the nation, which was all in a neighbouring country, should be nothing at home. The sense of literary restraint became daily more oppressive. Writers felt dissatisfied with private controversies on forbidden subjects; they longed for the broad day of publicity enjoyed by English philosophers. The French Parliament likewise envied the authority of the English Commons; similar feelings pervaded every class: the nobles felt wounded at the servility to which they were compelled by the monarch; the higher clergy submitted impatiently to the yoke of royal authority; whilst the tiers-état, or bourgeoisie, disliked the nobles and priests, because they saw them, though weak and powerless, in possession of the most valuable privileges. Had the upper classes been strong and active, the hardship would not have been felt so much: the logic of practical life teaches that power and privilege must associate; but they were feeble and corrupt. All that was left of the old feudal system was the inequality of ranks: the good it effected had vanished; the evil remained.

This spirit of discontent was increased by the writings of the exiled and persecuted Huguenots, who had taken refuge in Holland or England. Their works, full of bitter attacks on Louis XIV. and Catholicism, were, in spite of every prohibition, introduced in France; where they spread the hatred of

the monarch and of the Church, without serving the Protestant faith: which, like Jansenism, was only used as a form of opposition to the ruling power. Amongst these writers were some whose enmity had a much deeper object than the annoyance of their persecutor. Their chief was Bayle, who always wavered between the Protestant and Catholic faiths; unable to fix his mind on either creed.

Bayle seems to have written to shew the vanity of all belief: his scepticism was not, however, a creed, like that of the French Encyclopédists; who were as intolerant as their opponents. His mind, which gave him plausible reasons for everything, was too impartial for enthusiasm. But the immense research to which he devoted his whole life, and the merciless patience with which he accumulated all the destructive facts and arguments likely to bear on any subject he had taken in hand, rendered his works, what they have been truly termed, "an arsenal," from which the French philosophers, and Voltaire especially, drew their most fatal weapons.

This sceptical contempt extended even to literature. The faith in ancient art, so characteristic of the seventeenth century in France, almost vanished with the new era. La Mothe, though a poet, (a weak one, it is true,) attacked versification, as a superfluous mode of expressing what could as well be told in prose. In spite of the learned Madame Dacier's indignation, he endeavoured, like Perrault, to lower Homer from the high rank assigned him by the admiration of ages. Though this heresy of art produced no important result, it announced the coming of other times, when judgment would replace traditionary reverence and implicit belief. Freethinking soon became synonymous with taste and philosophy; the keen wish for discussion on forbidden subjects could no longer be confined within the limits of a fashionable drawing-room: sceptical philosophers resorted to the public coffee-houses, where, by using fictitious terms, they succeeded in carrying on warm controversies, in spite of the police spies. The gardens of the Tuileries were frequented by ardent politicians; and loudly expressed wishes for the beginning of a

new reign, might be heard under the windows of the royal palace.

Such were the varied elements of which declining society consisted at the close of Louis the Fourteenth's long reign: a gloomy court, rendered austere by the king, but which still remained impure at heart; a weak clergy; licentious nobles; a deeply discontented bourgeoisie; a host of daring thinkers, impatient to attack the old social edifice; women of great wit, but little virtue, capriciously exerting their almost sovereign influence—everywhere the traces of forthcoming dissolution.

The political condition of France was equally gloomy and precarious. The extravagant war, undertaken against the half of Europe, in order to place the monarch's grandson on the throne of Spain, had reduced the kingdom to a state of great distress. Through the influence of Madame de Maintenon and Chamillart, the minister of her making, weak and imbecile generals were opposed to the first captains of the age. Another fatal error was to clog the motions of those generals, with the timid measures decided upon by the king and his over-cautious minister, in the boudoir of Madame de Maintenon. The war thus protracted, instead of being brought to a close, assumed a most alarming aspect for France, and overshadowed with melancholy forebodings the close of a reign once celebrated for its greatness and magnificence. When this struggle had at length been brought to a favourable issue, Louis XIV. was overwhelmed with grief by the successive deaths of his only son the Dauphin, the Duchess of Burgundy, her husband, their young child, and the Duke of Berri, the king's youngest grandson. Of his numerous legitimate descendants, the only survivors were Philip V. of Spain, and his great-grandchild, the Duke of Anjou. The sudden deaths of all these royal individuals were attended by such singular symptoms, that the majority of the nation attributed them to poison administered by the Duke of Orleans. The prince studied chemistry under a foreign savant, named Homberg, and he was immediately accused of being skilled in

poisons, and of wishing, through this means, to make himself a way to the throne. The Duke of Orleans, whom these calumnies drove to despair, requested the king to send him to the Bastile, in order to a await a regular trial. Louis refused: though he disliked his nephew, he could not believe in his guilt. The accusations directed against him, nevertheless influenced the policy he adopted, with regard to the regency of the kingdom. Whilst he nominally confided it to the Duke of Orleans, he placed the real power in the hands of his own illegitimate son, the Duke of Maine. To this he was greatly urged by Madame de Maintenon, who, having educated his natural children, loved them with the tenderness of a mother. Already had she obtained for them the decree which effaced the illegitimacy of their birth, declared them princes of the blood, and gave them the right of succession to the crown. Not satisfied with this, she next wrung from Louis a testament wholly in favour of the Duke of Maine. He complied, without deceiving himself as to the extent of the respect or obedience his once absolute will would receive when he had been removed by death.

The power of Madame de Maintenon over such a strong mind as that of Louis XIV. is a singular feature in the history of his reign. This remarkable woman, whom posterity has judged more impartially than her contemporaries, seems to have been disliked chiefly because her austerity, which she communicated to the king, repressed the impatience and licentiousness of the young generation. Notwithstanding all that has been asserted to her prejudice, she certainly possessed many eminent qualities. Though not gifted with the brilliant wit of her rival, Madame de Montespan, she was remarkable for great good sense, exquisite tact, and a severe simplicity which seemed to reject, for both her mind and her person, all the embellishments of art. The early history of this celebrated woman is too well known to be related here. From the widow of the burlesque poet, Scarron, she became, at the age of fifty-two, the wife of one of the greatest kings of Europe. Though her marriage was never acknowledged,

she was queen in reality. Her patient ambition had raised her from obscurity to a throne; but this feeling was, with her, void of energy or greatness. The few political acts in which she participated were marked by the timidity and cautiousness of her character. She did too much to be forgiven by her enemies, and too little to crush them. She had none of the commanding qualities which exact respect, even whilst they may excite hatred. In her friendships, she shewed, to the last, both the natural coldness of her character, and her want of moral courage. Her influence over her contemporaries was merely transient; she was naturally grave and austere, and in her old age she became devout and intolerant. She succeeded in imparting enough of these qualities to the king to add to the gloom of his court. At the death of Louis XIV., her power ceased; and when she retired to Saint Cyr, the outward respect which had been paid, till then, to modesty and virtue vanished from the court of France. The only portion of her political influence which survived her, was that which she exerted for the Duke of Maine. This woman, who never asked anything for herself or for her relatives, was constantly importuning the king for his legitimised son. She spared no effort in order to secure the testament which was to raise her beloved pupil to power.

There must have been something inexpressibly bitter for the old king in those intrigues, tending to remind him daily of his approaching end, and carried on by those most dear to him. The unhappy state of the country added to his melancholy. His wars and extravagance had reduced France to the brink of ruin: her finances had fallen into a most deplorable condition. But, whilst Louis entertained a bitter consciousness of his errors, he had not the courage to repair them: he left the arduous task to his successor. Though he bore his misfortunes with dignity, the people could not forgive him the shame and misery he had brought down on France. The shadow of that idolatrous homage, so long granted to him, now alone remained. Fear and hatred filled almost every heart. The king had ceased to be invincible; and, though he

displayed more moral greatness in his last years than during any other portion of his life, the grandeur with which he had dazzled the nation so long had vanished for ever. Those who had seen him surrounded by Colbert, Condé, Turenne, Corneille, Racine, and Molière, were no more. His former greatness was merely traditionary, whilst the reverses caused by his ambition were still recent. Louis himself, who seemed conscious of having lived too long for his fame, beheld his last hour undismayed. Before his end, he had an opportunity of testing the truth of the protestations he had made on the vanity of life and of an earthly crown; for, when it was known that he had only a few hours more to live, the courtiers deserted the royal palace, in order to gather round the Duke of Orleans, or his rival, the Duke of Maine. Even Madame de Maintenon abandoned the dying monarch, and, fearing her numerous enemies, retired beforehand to Saint Cyr. Louis vainly asked for her: she was gone. Only a few menials remained near the deathbed of the monarch, who, for nearly a century, had filled all Europe with the splendid follies and hollow glory of his reign.

CHAPTER I.

THE REGENT—HIS COURT AND HIS FAMILY.

Louis XIV. had not yet been laid near his ancestors, in the Royal Abbey of Saint Denis, when the deep reaction caused by his death, in the general aspect of society, became apparent. By the mere force of his despotic will, the late monarch had prolonged the spirit of the seventeenth century beyond its natural limits; and it is only from the accession of Louis XV. that the eighteenth century can, philosophically speaking, be dated.

The death of the aged sovereign was welcomed with a feeling akin to joy, by the nation who had so long idolised his very name. The unhappy and starving people, who ascribed all their misery to his extravagance and overweening ambition, and who, during the last years of his reign, had often muttered curses not loud but deep, now openly exulted over the death of the tyrant. The signs of gladness exhibited at his funeral, when the people sang and drank on the road leading to Saint Denis, were too open to be misunderstood. Before plunging into the wild excesses of the regency, the nation seemed to exult at the removal of that stern restraint beneath which it had bowed so long.

This spirit of animosity against the will of the late monarch, tended to consolidate the power of the regent.

The death of Louis XIV. called to the throne, under the name of Louis XV., a sickly child, five years of age. The next heirs to the crown were—his uncle, Philip V. of Spain; the Duke of Orleans; the Princes of Condé and Conti; and Louis the Fourteenth's legitimised sons, the Duke of Maine and the Count of Toulouse. The treachery of one of Madame

de Maintenon's friends had rendered the Duke of Orleans acquainted with the contents of the monarch's testament. Before allowing the parliament to examine the document, he therefore caused them to recognise his right to the regency, as first prince of the blood; and adroitly promised to restore the ancient right of addressing remonstrances to the crown, of which they had been deprived by Louis XIV. The testament was then opened: it nominally gave the regency to the Duke of Orleans, but the real power was awarded by it to the Duke of Maine. The parliament were favourably disposed towards this prince, whose wife had long endeavoured to secure their good-will, through the President de Mesmes, promising, in case the testament were confirmed, to restore their privileges; but the Duke of Orleans appealed to their decision, whilst his rival affected to draw his right solely from his father's will. By supporting the claims of the former, which were also the most just, the parliament had, therefore, the satisfaction of boldly asserting their authority in opposition to that of the late monarch; whilst the mere act of deciding between two princes of the blood, who appeared before them as rival candidates for the regency, was calculated to gratify their vanity and increase their real importance. The will of Louis XIV. was, therefore, entirely set aside, and the Duke of Orleans invested with unlimited authority.

The Duke of Maine, though not void of ambition, was too timid to venture on more than feeble remonstrances. After seeing himself despoiled by the parliament of all the advantages secured to him by his late father's will, the superintendence of the young king's education alone excepted, he silently retired, to meet the bitter reproaches of his violent and ambitious wife.

Society now assumed a wholly new aspect. The regent followed the plans of the Duke of Burgundy, and, rejecting the despotic centralisation adopted by the late king, divided the unity of government by creating fifty-two state counsellors. Instead of the servile adulation which had so long greeted the name of Louis XIV., the most bitter opprobrium

was now heaped upon his memory, with comparative impunity, by a host of virulent pamphleteers. Jansenism, which he had persecuted, was tolerated; the spirit of freedom and equality he had sternly checked, accompanied this reaction. The President de Mesmes was the first individual of inferior rank who presumed to go into deep mourning, the privilege of high birth, after the monarch's death. To complete the contrast, the court, from that appearance of austere devotion which it had worn under Madame de Maintenon, passed to the most open profligacy. The courtiers adapted themselves to the change with Protean facility. The old doting Duke of Noailles, whose hypocritical piety had won the favour of Louis XIV., now affected to patronise an opera dancer, in order to pay his court to the regent, and appeared disgracefully intoxicated at the opera ball on the first night of its opening. These public balls had been suggested to the regent by the Chevalier de Bouillon, who was rewarded with a pension of 6000 *livres* for his fortunate idea. As the opera then stood in the gardens of the Palais Royal, the Duke of Orleans could pass from a private apartment of his palace into the theatre, mingling unknown with the masked crowd of every rank and class assembled there. The progress of equality was not the result of an acknowledged right, but of the ennui and profligacy of the nobles.

A turbulent and corrupt society was, moreover, adapted to the taste of the regent. Though clever and talented, he was too aristocratic to encourage philosophy and literature by mingling with their professors: intercourse founded on intellectual pursuits levels the artificial distinctions of rank. To such society the regent preferred that of profligate noblemen and abandoned women: though their companionship might degrade the man, he imprudently concluded that it could not lessen the dignity of the prince.

No man was ever so thoroughly identified by his character with the times in which he lived, as Philip of Orleans. His mingled atheism and superstition were the natural result of a mind too conscious of its own immorality not to wish to

deny the existence of an Almighty Being, and too much imbued with native faith to do so with impunity. The regent could not reconcile Christianity, or even deism, with his conduct—which either creed would have reproved; but he could seek for the philosopher's stone, endeavour to penetrate the secrets of futurity through the aid of fortune-tellers, or even, as he confessed to Saint Simon, spend whole hours in adjuring the spirit of evil to appear—and this wild belief laid no check on his conscience: to admit the existence of a God would have filled his inmost being with all the fearful and avenging terrors of self-condemnation. This was why he made so open a boast of his impiety; as though, by shutting himself out from all hope of repentance, he could also have shut out from his soul the light of eternal truth.

This struggle between atheism and belief, led the regent to seek oblivion, alternately, in all the excesses of dissipation, and in varied intellectual pursuits. Chemistry, music, painting, engraving, were succeeded by the most disgraceful orgies. But neither study nor pleasure, nor even power, when he possessed it, could free him from the ennui which unceasingly assailed his soul. This feeling of weariness shewed that the regent, even whilst plunged in corruption, had a mind fitted for better things. His original nature was noble, frank, brave, trusting, and generous; but the notorious Dubois, his preceptor, so perverted his youth, that his moral sense was never fully developed. The young prince was taught to despise human nature before he could judge of it; to look upon love, faith, and friendship, as hollow names; and to consider selfishness the great motive of mankind. Under this teaching, grew up the future regent of France; dissembling, and acting on the maxim of *divide et impera*, whenever he found it convenient, and only indulging in his natural frankness because it was better suited to his humour; never seeking to have a friend, or to be loved by any of his numerous mistresses, because he had no faith either in friendship or in love. This unhappy scepticism neutralised the effect of the regent's best qualities: his kind-

ness of heart was only shewn in good-humoured forbearance towards his enemies; the activity of his intellect, wasted on trifles, could not save him from ennui; and he fully verified his mother's ingenious apologue:—"That though good fairies had gifted her son, at his birth, with numerous qualities, one envious member of the sisterhood had spitefully decreed that he should never know how to use any of these gifts."

These contradictions in a character where atheism, profligacy, and credulity appear mingled with glimpses of a better nature; the wild thirst for excitement, and the deep weariness attendant on its indulgence, are alike characteristic of the regent and of the regency, and have rendered the two names inseparable. Even that deep immorality which led the prince to glory in his errors, thus justifying the severe remark of Louis XIV., "c'est un fanfaron devices," is to be traced throughout that period, the most shameless and corrupt of French history.

A court, to which the prince gave the first example of profligacy, could not but be the home of every vice. The suppers—which took place in a remote apartment of the Palais Royal, where the regent shut himself up with his roués and a few abandoned women, amongst whom often figured his own daughter, the Duchess of Berri—soon acquired a scandalous notoriety, increased by the affected mystery with which they were surrounded. It now became fashionable for every nobleman, and for many high-born ladies, to possess in the suburbs of Paris one of those petites maisons, afterwards so notorious: but which had been recently introduced by the devotees of the court of Louis XIV., who intended them for abodes of prayer and mortification, little foreseeing the very different uses to which they were to be applied. This affected veil of decency only increased the scandal it was destined to conceal: the mere possession of one of these convenient villas was in itself sufficiently significant.

With such a state of society, it is easy to understand that, notwithstanding his profligacy and unprepossessing figure, the Duke of Orleans no sooner became regent, than all the clever

and unprincipled women, who had until then vainly sought a free scope for their intrigues, fixed their eyes upon him, as one whom it required few personal charms to fascinate, and whose yielding temper would allow him to be easily governed. They soon perceived their mistake. No man ever submitted less to the influence of woman than the regent. Neither the female members of his family, nor his numerous mistresses, possessed any share of his confidence. The power which he allowed Dubois to acquire over him shews, however, that the regent was not guided by principle; his motive was the deep and undisguised contempt he entertained for women: a feeling justified by his personal experience, as he had seldom held any intercourse save with the most profligate of their sex.

When the witty Madame de Sabran once attempted to enter into a conversation on state affairs, he led her to a looking-glass, and, with ironical gallantry, asked her if it was suitable to talk of such dull matters to so charming a face? Madame de Sabran took the hint, but avenged herself by declaring at one of the regent's suppers, "that, when man had been created, some of the mud which remained, served to fashion the souls of princes and lacqueys." Her lover only laughed at the sarcasm; which will give an idea of the tone that prevailed on such occasions. The clever and intriguing Madame de Tencin, who spared no pains to captivate the regent, and who even inspired him with a short caprice, was still more unsuccessful. When she attempted to influence him in a political matter, an insulting reply and marked contempt were the only results of her effort. Not even at those suppers, where he fell into the last stage of inebriety, did the prince give the least clue of his political designs to his companions: he avoided, however, surrounding himself with too clever women; and his favourite mistress, Madame de Parabère, owed the preference he granted her over her rivals to the poverty of her intellect and the frivolousness of her character, which prevented her from taking any interest in matters unconnected with her pleasures.

Thus, during the eight years of the regent's sway, women

exercised no influence through him. Those who frequented his court only shared in its profligacy and licentiousness, without rendering it less gross or offensive. A sketch of the female members of the regent's family will suffice to give an idea of that court, and of its prevailing tone.

MADAME, his mother, was a haughty Palatine princess, full of ancestral pride and moral rigidity. She had been married, at an early age, to the only brother of Louis XIV., MONSIEUR, —an indolent, narrow-minded man, whose highest pleasure lay in wearing rouge, patches, and female apparel. Madame, on the contrary, had all the breadth and masculine vigour which her husband lacked; her mind was noble, frank, sincere, and above meanness or disguise: excessive politeness she scorned, as a species of deceit no one ever accused her of practising. Her manners were, like her person, eccentric, and somewhat coarse. Her short, square figure, heavy German countenance, and hands of unrivalled ugliness, contrasted unfavourably with the beauty of the Duke of Orleans's first wife, the lovely and accomplished Henrietta of England.

Madame rendered herself remarkable at the court of France, chiefly for the persevering nationality with which she clung to what she termed "our good old German customs." Tea, coffee, and chocolate, she scorned, as "foreign drugs;" French soups made her ill, and compelled her to comfort her German stomach with ham and sausages. Her greatest boast was that she had introduced sauer kraut into France, and caused Louis XIV. to relish her favourite omelet of salt herrings. Courtly amusements had no charms for her; her masculine tastes and robust constitution made her delight in dogs, horses, hunting, and every species of violent exercise; she disliked dress, as only calculated to draw attention to the plainness of her person: her general costume of a round, close wig like that of a man, and a tight-fitting riding-habit, somewhat increased, however, the grotesque appearance of her square and thick figure.

The honest mind of this princess was never reconciled to the duplicity of the court: where, as she said, falsehood

passed for wit, and frankness for simplicity. Paris seemed to her another Babylon; and when it thundered, she feared lest the impious city should be reduced to ashes. This austere turn, which preserved her from corruption, was joined to excessive pride. This feeling, which convinced her that she had highly honoured her husband by marrying him, also induced her to seclude herself from the court; not deeming the etiquette which was there observed, sufficiently rigorous. To her high indignation, the courtiers were allowed to keep on their hats during the promenade, and even to sit down in the drawing-room of Marly. Of this exaggerated hauteur Madame gave several instances; one of which terminated fatally. Two female adventurers, who claimed the title of Countesses Palatine, were placed by Madame de Maintenon near the person of her niece. Madame's anger, on hearing of the indignity thus offered to her name, was unbounded. Seeing one of the pretended countesses walking with several other persons in a public promenade of Versailles, she went up to her, and, after addressing her in the most opprobrious language, ended by threatening her with such condign punishment, that the unhappy girl, struck with shame and terror, fainted away, and died in a few days. Every one blamed Madame, and Louis told her the honour of her house had been too severely avenged. She replied, with much stateliness, that she liked neither lies nor liars, and, without more compunctious visitings, she dismissed the subject from her mind. A character which, notwithstanding its honesty and truth, was so little remarkable for amiability, did not allow Madame to exercise much influence at the court of her brother-in-law; where she seems to have had but one friend, Louis XIV., and one enemy, Madame de Maintenon. Nothing could remove the mutual antipathy of these two women. Madame's hatred was coarse, violent, and prejudiced: she loaded the king's secret wife with abuse, and literally believed her to be in the habit of poisoning her enemies. Madame de Maintenon's animosity was more cool and active: she strove to lessen the influence of Madame over the monarch's mind;

and, what was more easy, to injure her son, the Duke of Orleans, who had deeply offended her. The two rivals not only hated, but despised one another. The haughty German princess knew that the royal favourite had not attained that high position without practising arts, to which the prospect of an empire would not have induced her to stoop; whilst the philosophic Madame de Maintenon looked down with secret scorn on the proud Palatine princess, who could be so wrapped up in the glory of her ancestors as to feel indifferent to the reality of power, though she rigorously exacted the vain shadow of etiquette due to her rank. So little, indeed, was Madame consulted, that the marriage between her son and Mademoiselle de Blois, daughter of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan, was agreed upon without her knowledge. Her indignation, at what she considered a degrading alliance, was such, that, on meeting her son in the gallery of Versailles, she gave him a slap on the face, in the presence of a host of witnesses. The poor prince, who had only yielded a reluctant consent to the match, needed not this new mortification.

Madame did not possess more power under the regency: she was of opinion that France had already been too much governed by women for its welfare, and never sought to interfere but once. This was when her son was named regent: she then exacted from him a solemn promise that he would never employ Dubois in any official capacity. Though the regent gave her his word that her request should be obeyed, it was not long ere Madame learned that he had eluded his promise: she attempted no further political interference, but remained satisfied with her son's affection and respectful behaviour.

"Although my son is regent," she observes in one of her letters, "he never comes to see me, nor even parts from me, without kissing my hand before I embrace him; nor will he allow me to hand him a seat. Nevertheless he is not timid, but speaks freely: indeed, we laugh and chat together in a very friendly manner."

It was, perhaps, to beguile the ennui of her secluded life,

that Madame began that voluminous correspondence, of which a few extracts have been published under the name of her memoirs: she, literally, seemed to live for no other purpose than that of writing to her German relations, many of whom she had never seen, but whom she loved; and, according to the degree of their relationship, with a fervour which had never allowed her to forgive Louis XIV. for remarking, "that it was *bien bourgeois* to be fond of one's relatives." Each day was devoted to different correspondents, whom Madame regaled with all the scandal of the court. Though her zeal was unwearied, she confesses that when she had written in one day about twenty pages to the Princess of Wales—afterwards Queen of George II.—ten or twelve to her daughter, the Duchess of Lorraine, and about twenty more to the Queen of Sicily, she felt in need of repose.

With her son's wife, the Duchess of Orleans, Madame could never agree. To forgive her for being the daughter of Madame de Montespan, would have been impossible: she might, however, have been mollified by a proper degree of humility; but the young duchess, who overlooked the illegitimacy of her birth to remember that she was the daughter of Louis XIV., felt convinced she had greatly honoured her husband by marrying him. She was handsome, haughty, and apathetic; satisfied with the Duke of Orlean's show of respect, she appeared unconcerned at his numerous infidelities: even before her marriage she confessed that she cared not for his affection, and only wanted the rank of his wife. Her children were almost strangers to her: her brothers seemed to be the chief objects of her affection; and she was not without hopes of exercising, through them, the political influence her husband had not allowed her to take over him. Owing to her excessive indolence, the superintendence of the education of her three eldest daughters devolved upon Madame; whose correspondence was grievously disturbed by these new cares. Those three princesses were, the Duchess of Berri, Mademoiselle de Valois, and Mademoiselle de Chartres.

Madame de Berri, who had been married at an early age to

Louis the Fourteenth's youngest grandson, was a handsome but violent and sensual woman. Her abandoned profligacy recalled that of those dissolute princesses, who filled Rome with the scandal of their excesses, towards the decline of the empire. Her inordinate ambition had induced her to lay those inclinations under control until her marriage was over; but two days after the ceremony, she was brought home intoxicated from a supper at court. Her intemperance and profligacy henceforth became notorious. Her husband, who was at first passionately attached to her, soon grew disgusted with her conduct. This feeling was increased by the impiety she affected in her conversations with her father, who had brought her up in his atheistical principles. So reckless did Madame de Berri become, that she seriously insisted on flying from the kingdom with her favourite lover, la Haye. The danger, however, terrified him: he revealed everything to her father, who, with much difficulty, made her give up this wild plan. The early death of her husband, by giving her more freedom, increased her license; and the accession of the regent to power, removed the slight restraint imposed upon her by Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon.

Her arrogance, which had always been great, henceforth became excessive. She spared nothing to humble her own mother, whom she hated for being the daughter of Madame de Montespan. Between her and Madame there existed an endless quarrel on the right of precedence, and other matters of etiquette. Owing to the weakness of her father, Madame de Berri soon assumed the style of a sovereign princess: she gave orders of banishment, crossed Paris to the warlike sound of trumpets, and received foreign ambassadors, enthroned in state under a canopy. Even whilst degrading herself by every vice, she exacted the deepest outward homage, and learned, with indignation, that her princely rank could not exempt her from the contempt due to her profligacy. She felt an instinctive hatred for those women whose conduct seemed to reprove her own. Her jealousy of Madame du Maine was excessive: she could not forgive her the contrast

which the *nuits blanches* of Sceaux, that home of elegance and refinement, offered to the scandalous orgies of the Luxembourg, where she resided.

Notwithstanding her atheism and licentiousness, Madame de Berri had sudden fits of terror and devotion, which led her to retire occasionally to a convent of Carmelites. The whole sisterhood were then edified by the fervour she displayed, and some of the simple-minded nuns deplored, in her presence, the malice of those who calumniated so pious a princess. Madame de Berri laughed to hear them speak thus; and, after a few days spent in austerity, returned to her former mode of life. Her chief lover was Riom, a nobleman of high birth, but whose brutality and revolting personal appearance shewed the depravity of this unhappy woman's taste. Her love for him resembled infatuation, and increased with his harshness and tyranny. Riom only followed in this the lessons of his uncle Lauzun; the same who was secretly married to Mademoiselle de Montpensier, and who averred that the Bourbons required to be led with a high hand. Madame de Berri soon became the slave of her lover, who loaded her with public insults, and made her receive into her intimacy his obscure or degraded companions; though, according to the laws of etiquette, no man, unless he were a prince of the blood, could be admitted at her table. The regent, indignant, not so much at his daughter's immorality as at the power assumed by Riom, often threatened to chastise his insolence; but Madame de Berri, who exercised over her father the ascendancy which her lover possessed over her, became so violent and irritated, that the duke was glad to ask for his forgiveness. The scandal caused by this intrigue increased, when it was known that the princess had given birth to a child in the palace of Luxembourg. As she was dangerously ill, the curé of Saint-Sulpice offered her the rites of the Church. She accepted; but when he came and made it a condition that Riom and her confidante, Madame de Mouchy, should both leave the palace, she refused indignantly. The regent interfered, but could not induce either his daughter or the priest to relent. When he

appealed to the cardinal of Noailles, the austere prelate approved the conduct of the curé, and ordered him not to leave the chamber-door of the princess, lest some more complaisant priest should administer to her privately. The curé obeyed, and whenever he was compelled to abandon his post, he caused another clergyman to replace him. When Madame de Berri was pronounced out of danger, he retired; but not till then. His conduct, which created great scandal, was nevertheless generally approved, as a bold and uncompromising reproof administered to the corruption of the age.

Madame de Berri vainly sought to lessen the effect of this disgraceful affair, by devoting herself and her whole household to the Virgin, for the space of six months; during which time they appeared clad in white from head to foot, to the great amusement of the Parisians. The increasing influence of Riom, and the terrors of her own conscience, at length induced Madame de Berri to contract a private marriage with her lover: she even determined on acknowledging herself publicly as his wife. The fatal illness which carried her to the grave, prevented her from fulfilling this project. She long refused to believe in her approaching end, which she hastened by her intemperance; but, on becoming convinced of her danger, she resolved to pass from this world to the next with the pomp and solemnity suited to her high rank. Lying on a bed of state, and surrounded by the hushed and attentive members of her household, the dying princess, after bidding them all a last farewell, received the rites of the Church in their presence. When the ceremony was over, she proudly asked one of her attendants, "if this was not dying with courage and greatness?" Her relatives were, however, so much embarrassed by the notoriety of her ill-conduct, that they had her conveyed privately to Saint Denis, and buried without pomp. Even the effrontery of the age could not have tolerated her funeral eulogy. Madame was at first much grieved at the death of her grand-daughter; but, on learning that she had actually been married to her lover, she indignantly dried her tears. The pride of birth superseded every other feeling.

Madame had, moreover, never been much attached to her son's eldest daughter, whose conduct was only calculated to dishonour her high rank: her favourite was Mademoiselle de Chartres, a beautiful and eccentric girl, who indulged in masculine amusements; delighting in dogs and horses, and firing off pistols all the day long. She had all her father's versatility of talent: theology, music, surgery, fireworks, and even wig and flower-making, were her chief occupations; but, like the regent, she could find no real pleasure in those varied tasks. Her strong Jansenist turn induced her to enter a convent, and take religious vows; her relatives vainly opposed this determination: she carried her point, and became abbess of the convent of Chelles, in her eighteenth year. This event produced no change in her mode of life. Mother Bathilda, as she was now called, still indulged in her love for dogs, horses, and fireworks; completely destroying the peace of the poor recluses, whom she bled and doctored herself when they happened to be ill, and tormented, when they were in good health, by her alternate indulgence and austerity. Growing weary of her power, the young abbess at length resigned it in favour of one of her friends. This was no sooner effected than she wished to regain her freedom. After some negotiation she removed to the Benedictine convent of la Madeleine du Fresnel, where she occupied a handsome apartment, and spent the remainder of her life; her active mind leading her to study the most abstruse and the most futile subjects alternately, and, whatever she did, still leaving her a prey to unconquerable ennui.

Mademoiselle de Valois, her sister, is chiefly celebrated for her attachment for the Duke of Richelieu; whom she was said to introduce into her apartment in the Palais Royal through means of a mysterious cupboard, supposed to contain preserves. Madame, to whom she gave an infinite deal of trouble, disliked her, and was so highly incensed at Richelieu's audacity, that she once sent him word not to approach the place where she then was with her grand-daughter, if he valued his life. The duke thought it prudent to obey.

When the regent wished to marry Mademoiselle de Valois to the Prince of Piedmont, Madame candidly informed his mother, the Queen of Sicily, of the young princess's intrigue with Richelieu. The match was immediately broken off. Though at first annoyed by his mother's indiscretion, the regent ended by laughing at it; but it is likely that this proof of her secrecy in diplomatic matters confirmed him in the resolve of not granting her any political influence. The character of Madame would not have allowed her to possess any other. She felt no sympathy with the world in which she lived, and it had none for her. When her death occurred in 1722, she was scarcely missed from the court of France. But even those who did not appreciate her real worth respected her, and she was universally acknowledged to be one of the few princesses of the royal family whose virtue remained beyond suspicion.

Her contemporaries called her a woman of the olden time; and many of those who saw her secluding herself in uncompromising austerity from a corrupt court, must indeed have been strongly reminded of one of those stiff, gaunt figures of the old masters, rudely drawn, and ungainly in their bearing, but full of truth, originality, and sterling worth.

The characters of the other female relatives of the regent are more significant, so far as regards their epoch, than that of Madame. The apathetic pride of the Duchess of Orleans, the abandoned profligacy of her daughters, the Duchess of Berri and Mademoiselle de Valois, the eccentric and restless spirit of Mademoiselle de Chartres, paint the court of the regent: that home of wild, unbridled license, where woman was too much fallen to exercise any power.

In regarding those licentious times, we perceive that this utter recklessness of public opinion springs from the thirst of excitement which fills a decaying society. Wild systems, which appeal to the covetousness and prodigality of the masses, then prevail; atheistical princes disdain to believe in a God, whilst they study the occult sciences; degraded women openly sully the most illustrious names of France—

all seem to feel that the reign of the aristocracy is drawing to a close, and endeavour to give themselves a fictitious youth by excesses, which only betray the corruption of old age. And, as though to mark how deep is the seat of that corruption, a princess, of undoubted virtue, thinks it more dishonourable for her grand-daughter to become the wife of a private nobleman, than to be his acknowledged mistress.



J.V. Kringlagen sc.

Duchess du Maine.

CHAPTER II.

MADAME DU MAINE—THE SOCIETY OF SCEAUX—THE CELLAMARE CONSPIRACY.

THE influence which the regent did not allow woman to possess at his court, was soon exercised in favour of his enemies. Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon-Condé, Duchess of Maine, was the acknowledged chief of the strong and dangerous party opposed to his power; her high rank, talents, and ambition rendered her influence formidable; and had she only been able to impart her own active and energetic spirit to her husband, the Duke of Orleans would not have obtained the regency without a severe struggle.

The influence of Madame du Maine was increased by the universal seduction she exercised,—a seduction the more remarkable that she was neither beautiful nor striking in her personal appearance. Her figure was not good, and was as slight and diminutive as that of a child; her manner was lively and petulant; but she could, when she chose, give it a haughty dignity, which at once betrayed the daughter of the proud and princely Condés. She had the features of her race—more characteristic and expressive than beautiful; with light-coloured hair, a good complexion spoiled by rouge, and fine, expressive eyes, which often lit up her countenance with sudden beauty. She was naturally clever, and had received an excellent classical education. Her wit was light and brilliant; her language rapid, precise, and singularly felicitous. The art of talking well was seldom carried further than at her little court: both she and her husband excelled in this gift; they had probably acquired it from the duke's mother, Madame de Montespan, who was celebrated for the hereditary

wit of the Mortemarts, and imparted her pure and elegant phraseology to those who lived in her intimacy. The character of Madame du Maine, which was a compound of superficial wit, ambition, and caprice, did not adapt her, however, to the high political part she was anxious to act. She was bold, active, and vehement, but deficient in moral courage. She could struggle long and perseveringly for any object in view,—and whether this object was the discovery of the magic square or the regency of the kingdom, she displayed equal energy: but there was more restlessness than determination in her character; and she never learned to bear, with even common equanimity, the misfortunes occasioned by her own imprudence. Her temper was violent, fickle, and selfish. Notwithstanding her wit and learning, she had a great horror of solitude and ennui, and could not dispense with the society of those individuals for whom she cared least. "I am very fond of company," she frankly said, "for I listen to no one, and every one listens to me." She was accordingly seldom to be found alone. The crowd which surrounded her was not always very select. Her old admirer, Saint-Aulaire, who professed a romantic passion for her, and whom she called her shepherd, tired of this noisy and uninteresting assemblage, once impatiently asked her what she wanted with persons so little suited to her. "My dear shepherd," she candidly answered, "I am so unhappy as not to be able to do without that which I do not need in the least." This frankness originated in the Duchesse du Maine from temperament, reasoning, and selfish indifference to those around her. "I never tell a lie—I never attempt to dissemble," she once composedly observed; "because I know very well that no one can ever be deceived." Notwithstanding the numerous faults which she unreservedly displayed to her most devoted adherents, there was about this clever and volatile princess an irresistible charm, that never failed to fascinate those who lived in her intimacy.

Her Royal Highness was not only fond of intellectual company; she also liked to indulge in those literary and platonic

friendships set in fashion by the précieuses of the Hotel Rambouillet, a few of whom she had known in her younger days. She was accordingly surrounded, at her residences of Sceaux and Anet, with a chorus of adoring and versifying shepherds, of whom Saint-Aulaire was the chief, and who, even when the princess's few charms had long faded away, affected a mortal jealousy of one another. Amongst these shepherds, Malesieu, her grave tutor in classical lore, held high literary sway. "His decisions," says the lively Madame de Staal, "had the same infallibility as those of Pythagoras with his disciples. The most ardent disputes were silenced as soon as the words, *he has said it*, were heard."

La Mothe, the relentless foe of versification, ranked amongst the platonic admirers of Madame du Maine. Her correspondence with him, though little known and less read, still exists: it is the very essence of that light and frivolous *esprit*, which is rather an agreeable intellectual vivacity, than what we call wit. Those letters, if not intended for publication, were at least written to be widely read, like almost all the letters of this artificial period; Madame du Maine's were gravely discussed at the house of Madame de Lambert, where a polite assembly met every Tuesday. The princess, in her turn, circulated the epistles she received amongst her jealous shepherds. She playfully complains to De la Mothe of their tyranny; and he, in the same tone, explains the transports he experienced on receiving her last letter, brought expressly from Sceaux by a courier. Notwithstanding the insignificance of the whole correspondence, the feeling that it need never have been written, and that it is scarcely worth being read, it nevertheless possesses a certain nameless and well-bred grace of its own, which carries us back at once to the polished and frivolous circles of those times.

The amusements and platonic affections of Madame du Maine did not absorb her so far as to deaden her ambition. Her volatile temper rendered her no great favourite with either the austere old king or his sedate wife: she nevertheless paid her court very assiduously; and, taking advantage

of the great friendship Madame de Maintenon felt for her husband, earnestly besought to be considered as her daughter. The king, Madame de Maintenon, and Madame du Maine, all laboured to effect the aggrandisement of the duke; who, though not without ambition, was too weak and timid to labour in his own cause. The violent temper of his wife—little as she was, she had the reputation of beating him—and her tumultuous amusements at Sceaux, made him live with as great a degree of retirement as he could indulge in. Deformed, grave, and learned, he occupied himself with translations from the classics; whilst his active wife moved heaven and earth to secure him the regency at the death of the king. It was quite in vain she endeavoured to rouse him; the Duke of Maine had not even dormant energies to awaken: so his wife had at length discovered, when she bitterly exclaimed: "You will find, on awakening some day, that you are a member of the Academy, and that the Duke of Orleans is regent of the kingdom." Only the latter part of the prediction was fulfilled.

The ambition of Madame du Maine was not purely political. She aimed at being considered the patroness of talent; but, though she could appreciate wit and light literature, she wanted the discernment necessary to encourage genius. Her liking for poetry was very peculiar. She seemed to consider it in the light of an art to be exercised for the particular pleasure of princes and princesses. When she was ill, she said to those around her: "Write verses for me: I feel it is only verses that can give me any relief." Her patronage of literary men proved useful, however, to her political designs, and was favoured by the carelessness of the regent; who allowed "the little wasp of Sceaux," as he called her, to gather around her all the malcontents whom his government had made. It was in her magnificent residence at Sceaux, where she lived in almost royal style, that Madame du Maine carried on her ambitious plans, under the mask of frivolous amusements connected with her order of the Honey Bee; and that she received, with inimitable grace and tact, the

guests whom her inclination or her policy had drawn together. Seldom had there been seen an assemblage more brilliant in wit or in courtly graces, than that which gathered in the shady gardens of Sceaux. Elegant and accomplished women, many of them remarkable for their beauty, and a few for intrigues, over which they threw at least a veil of decency unknown at the court of the regent, daily mingled with men of great wit and talents, which were too often wasted in those entertaining, but unprofitable assemblies.

Amongst Madame du Maine's most constant guests were the President Henault, known for his songs and bon mots; the old Saint-Aulaire, whose hopeless passion for the duchess was expressed in languishing madrigals; Malesieu, her learned tutor, who read the tragedies of Sophocles to this careless assemblage; Chaulieu, the gay abbé and charming poet, whose wit, naïveté, and finesse, seemed unimpaired by old age; Genest, author of admired tragedies now forgotten, who has bequeathed to posterity a faithful account of the gaieties of Sceaux; and Vaubrun, the grave and obsequious courtier, who treated trifles with solemn gravity, lived in an atmosphere of fêtes, polite phrases, and etiquette, till he was actually termed, by Madame du Maine, "le sublime du frivole." The seductions of this witty and refined society attracted many occasional visitors; of these were the brilliant Fontenelle; La Mothe, the ingenious antagonist of Madame Dacier; J. B. Rousseau, the poet, and that young and daring Arouet, who had not yet acquired European fame under the name of Voltaire. A few of Madame du Maine's guests were destined to serve her political views. The handsome, eloquent, and insinuating Cardinal de Polignac, who plotted with her against the regent, vainly affected to be absorbed by his Latin poem of "Anti-Lucrèce," in order to give a literary cloak to his visits. The gloomy and bitter poet, Lagrange Chancel, took less pains to conceal that hatred of the regent which he expressed in his powerful, though repulsive, philippics. De Mêsmes, the president, through whom Madame du Maine influenced the parliament, and

the ambitious young Duke of Richelieu, were amongst those guests whom common interests, more than sympathy with its mistress, drew to Sceaux.

The individuals who composed this elegant little court, shared their days between intellectual pursuits and luxurious indolence. The madrigals of M. de Saint-Aulaire, or the epistles of Chaulieu; the philippics of Lagrange Chancel; fragments of Arouet's Œdipe, that bitter satire of the regent's profligacy; M. du Maine's translation of the Cardinal de Polignac's Anti-Lucrèce, and other productions, since buried in oblivion, ministered to their daily amusement. The evenings were devoted to the card-table, to dancing, theatrical performances, and fêtes in the open air, of the duchess's fantastical order of the Honey Bee. The women who shared this frivolous existence are, with a few exceptions, unknown to posterity: one of them, however, has left a name destined to survive the short-lived glitter of those splendid festivities, in which her humble condition forbade her to mingle openly. We allude to Mademoiselle de Launay, whose charming Memoirs have rendered her so well known, under the name of Baroness of Staal, but who was then only one of Madame du Maine's femmes de chambres.

A series of misfortunes had reduced Mademoiselle de Launay to this lowly station. Obscure by her birth, but superior to most women of rank by the brilliant education she had received in a convent of Normandy, of which the abbess had taken her under her express protection, the young girl grew up in a refined atmosphere, and surrounded by all the luxuries of wealth. Her studies shewed the bent of her mind: she cared little for poetry and music, but made considerable progress in geometry, and even took a tincture of anatomy; Mallebranche and Des Cartes were her favourite authors. Though her personal attractions were never great, her graceful wit gained her many admirers, amongst whom were Vertot, the celebrated historian, and a gentleman named Rey, whose feelings, though at first very ardent, gradually cooled. Of this Mademoiselle de Launay soon acquired geo-

metrical proof. M. de Rey was in the habit of seeing her home, occasionally, from the house of a mutual friend. "We were then obliged," she observes, "to cross a wide place, and, in the commencement of our acquaintance, he always walked along the sides of this place; but I now saw that he simply traversed it in the middle, whence I concluded that his love had diminished in the same proportion which exists between the diagonal of a square and the sides of the same." Mademoiselle de Launay's geometry was evidently practical.

The death of her benefactress threw her, unprotected, on the world at the age of seventeen. Fortunately for herself, the young girl possessed courage and a strong sense of independence. She firmly refused every offer of pecuniary assistance, and proceeded to Paris, where an intimate friend of Madame du Maine, the Duchess de la Ferté, took her under her protection. This kind, though capricious lady, was greatly pleased with Mademoiselle de Launay, whom she exhibited to her acquaintances in the character of a prodigy, regardless of the humiliation and deep shame of her protégée. "Come, mademoiselle," she once exclaimed, in the presence of a friend, "speak." To the visitor: "You will hear how she talks. Speak a little about religion,—you can say something else afterwards." Though thus put to the test, Mademoiselle de Launay's conversational powers did not desert her. The reputation of her wit soon extended to the little court of Madame du Maine, who thought of confiding to her the education of her own daughter. But, as the first novelty of her appearance wore off, the plan was abandoned. The fickle Duchess de la Ferté became, moreover, offended with her protégée; and when Mademoiselle de Launay applied to Malesieu for the place which had been promised her, he replied, that the only place Madame du Maine could offer now was that of attendant on her own person. The unhappy girl had no resource but to submit to this degrading offer: she keenly felt, however, the humiliations of her new position. Those persons who had admired her most during her temporary éclat, now affected to shun her; and Madame du

Maine, on whom she waited daily, scarcely deigned to seem conscious of her existence. A trifling incident drew her from this obscurity.

A beautiful girl, named Mademoiselle Tétard, who endeavoured to pass herself off for an inspired sybil, had drawn down some ridicule on Fontenelle: the celebrated author of the "Histoire des Oracles" was seriously asserted to have acknowledged her power. "De Launay, you ought to write to M. de Fontenelle, and tell him what the world thinks of him," carelessly observed Madame du Maine to her young attendant. Mademoiselle de Launay, who was acquainted with the witty philosopher, wrote to him the same day. Fontenelle was pleased with the graceful raillery of her letter, and shewed it in the evening to some friends, who had, laughingly, brought up the subject of Mademoiselle Tétard. The letter was read and admired; the persons present took copies of it, which were freely circulated over all Paris on the following day. In those times, when a well-turned madrigal could open the doors of the French Academy to Saint-Aulaire, it was only natural that Mademoiselle de Launay's letter should enjoy great success. In the meantime, the writer, unconscious of her sudden popularity, continued to wait on her princely mistress, and to signalise herself by that awkwardness in filling the duties of her place, which had brought her into great contempt among the body of the waiting-maids.

Madame du Maine learned by accident the fame acquired by her attendant: she was astonished, and henceforth took more notice of Mademoiselle de Launay; around whom now secretly gathered many of the remarkable men who came to Sceaux, and who often deserted the saloons of their princely hostess, for the gloomy and comfortless room of her witty femme de chambre.

The Abbé de Vaubrun, the assiduous courtier already alluded to, soon requested Mademoiselle de Launay's assistance for a fête, which Madame du Maine's predilection for late amusements induced him to offer her. The Goddess of Night, personated by Mademoiselle de Launay, accordingly

appeared before her royal highness, and thanked her, in a set speech, for the preference she gave the night over daytime. This was the origin of the *nuits blanches*, to which the courtly Dangeau thus alludes in his journal:—"Monday, 3d of December 1714. Madame, the Duchess of Maine, who is always at Sceaux, and will not return until the end of the month, continues her festivities. She acts Athalie, and the most considerable persons about court are present. From time to time there is also at Sceaux what is called the *nuits blanches*. They are marked by great magnificence and wit."

These festivities were offered to Madame du Maine by her guests, according to an alphabetical lottery which they had established. He who drew out the letter B was bound to give a ballet; C was for comedy; O for opera; and so on with the rest of the alphabet. Mademoiselle de Launay composed for the *nuits blanches* several ingenious plays, which added to their lustre. The death of Louis XIV., and the events by which it was followed, interrupted, for a time, these frivolous gaieties.

Madame du Maine now removed to Paris, and took up her abode in the Tuileries. Mademoiselle de Launay, whose task it was to read her mistress to sleep, soon acquired a large share of her confidence, and was initiated into all her hopes and schemes for the future. But, though she rose so much into favour as to relinquish her duties of attendant, and to be allowed a maid of her own, the occasional hauteur of the duchess never allowed her to forget her subordinate position. The world was less rigorous. Though she had only an obscure little room, without window or fireplace, in which to receive her friends, Mademoiselle de Launay gaily confesses that she was never at a loss for company. The witty Duke of Brancas, Fontenelle, Rémond, and the Abbé de Chaulieu, (who, though blind and near eighty, professed a romantic attachment for her,) were amongst those persons who willingly overlooked the narrow lodging of the young femme de chambre for the sake of her society. The harmless passion of Chaulieu, which he expresses in some of the last verses he ever wrote, rendered

the life of Mademoiselle de Launay very pleasant. His carriage was always at her disposal; he never visited her but with her express permission; and, whenever she agreed to honour them with her presence, he gave elegant fêtes, where the most select company of Paris was assembled, for her amusement. The intrigues of Madame du Maine, in which Mademoiselle de Launay was called to join, soon disturbed this agreeable life.

The active duchess was then busily engaged in repulsing the attacks of her numerous enemies. The weakness of the Duke of Maine encouraged the princes of the blood to protest against the edicts by which the legitimised children of Louis XIV. had been rendered their equals in rank. Madame du Maine answered this attack by a memorial, in which the rights of the legitimised princes were defended by all the arguments ancient or modern history could furnish. She was assisted in her labours by the Cardinal de Polignac, Malesieu, and Mademoiselle de Launay. The hours which had formerly been given to pleasure were now devoted to study; and the bed of the duchess was nightly covered with huge folios, under which, as she laughingly observed, she lay buried, like Enceladus beneath Mount Etna. When excess of fatigue caused her to relinquish her task, she was read to sleep by Mademoiselle de Launay; who, in her turn, endeavoured to snatch a few hours of troubled repose.

The memorial proved ineffectual, and the legitimised princes were deprived of the right of succession to the crown. As an answer to Madame du Maine's threats of revenge, the regent, moreover, took from her husband the superintendence of the young king's education, in presence of the parliament; whose resistance to the introduction of Law's system he ascribed to her influence. The Duke of Maine and the Count of Toulouse, who both assisted at the proceedings, withdrew, on the first hint of the measures which were going to be taken against them. The parliament witnessed the degradation of their protector, and saw their own edicts against Law broken by the regent's council, without venturing to remonstrate. When her

husband and her brother-in-law appeared before her, humble and crest-fallen, Madame du Maine upbraided them for their cowardice, in the most bitter and violent language. The weak President de Mêsmes she treated with deep and sarcastic contempt. When she was compelled to leave the apartment in the Tuileries, attached to the possession of her husband's late office, she displayed her violent temper and want of real dignity, by breaking all the looking-glasses, porcelains, and other fragile ornaments which it contained. Prudent remonstrances she treated with sovereign contempt; and in the height of her exasperation, unhesitatingly exclaimed: "My husband and his brothers are cowards: I—though only a woman—feel myself capable of asking an audience from the regent, and plunging a dagger in his heart."

Madame, who believed "the little dwarf" capable of any violence, felt really alarmed for her son's safety. Though he laughed at her fears, the regent kept a strict watch on the motions of the duchess. Madame du Maine was, indeed, bent upon revenge; her projects were favoured by the state of the country. The liberal policy, affected by the Duke of Orleans at the opening of the regency, was soon relinquished by him; with it vanished his brief popularity. The privileges granted to the parliamentary party had rendered them desirous of emulating the freedom and power of the English Commons. In order to check this spirit, the Duke of Orleans broke their edicts, and finally deprived them of the right of remonstrance. This arbitrary conduct created deep discontent in Paris. The provinces were equally inimical to the regent. The despotic centralisation of monarchy under Richelieu and Louis XIV., which led to future greatness and freedom, was still considered oppressive and tyrannical. The sense of local independence was so strong in Brittany, that the states refused to pay the taxes laid upon them by the regent, and carried on secret intrigues with Alberoni; offering to recognise his master, Philip V., regent, provided their province should become once more an independent duchy. Madame du Maine shewed much ability in turning this general discontent to her own advan-

tage: she encouraged the parliament, promised to aid the Bretons, and conciliated the whole provincial noblesse, by suggesting the convocation of the states-general; a measure which had always involved the kingdom in turmoil, and was, therefore, popular with a restless and ambitious aristocracy.

The influence of the duchess over literature enabled her to increase the unpopularity of the regent. The Œdipe of Voltaire, though patronised by the Duke of Orleans, was an attack against him and Madame de Berri; whom the Parisians soon called Berri-Jocaste: she affected not to understand the allusion, and assisted five times at the popular tragedy for which Voltaire was pensioned by her father. The philippics of La Grange Chancel were more open; every invective, which the most bitter hatred could imagine, was heaped by the misanthropic poet on the regent. When these odious productions were read to him, the prince affected to treat them with his usual carelessness; but, on hearing those lines which accused him of poisoning his relatives, and of administering even now a slow poison to the young king, tears of shame and indignation rolled down the cheeks of Philip of Orleans. La Grange Chancel was severely punished; but the effect of his calumnies remained in the hearts of the people.

The publication of the memoirs of Cardinal de Retz may, however, be considered as the literary coup-d'état of Madame du Maine. Her tutor, Malesieu, found the manuscript amongst forgotten papers in the library of the President de Mêsmes: he softened down a few passages, and gave the memoirs to the public, under the guidance of the duchess. Their success was truly prodigious. Independent of their literary merit, these memoirs, which related to the disorders of the Fronde under the regency of Anne of Austria, gave free scope to hopes and allusions openly encouraged by Madame du Maine; who, belonging to the same family as the beautiful Duchess of Longueville, longed to act, like her, the part of heroine and leader.

The chief intrigues of Madame du Maine were carried on with Spain. Philip V. had agreed to leave her husband the

real power, provided his right of heir-presumptive to the crown were acknowledged by the title of regent. His ambassador, Cellamare, had received instructions from Alberoni to further the views of the duchess by all the means in his power. Her own personal adherents were Malesieu, De Mêsmes, Mademoiselle de Launay, and the Cardinal of Polignac; whose ambition and terrors of discovery alternately hurried on or impeded the motions of the other conspirators. This clever and insinuating prelate was little adapted for the intrigues into which he was led by his love of aggrandisement. His extensive learning and literary tastes fitted him for an elegant retirement, from which his ambition induced him to emerge in the hope of bettering his fortunes. His character was timid and vacillating; he had only a feeble sense of honour, and held no consideration so high as that of his self-preservation. The imprudence of having such a man to share and guide her councils was manifest; but Madame du Maine gave another proof of her heedlessness, by the efforts which she made to secure the assistance of the Duke of Richelieu.

The duke was then in his twenty-second year; he was handsome, was acknowledged to dress inimitably, and two princesses of the royal blood, Mademoiselle de Valois and Mademoiselle de Clermont, of the house of Condé, had quarrelled on his account. The regent, however, mortified him deeply by treating with contempt his pretensions to diplomacy. Alberoni seized this opportunity to write him a letter, in which he praised his *great talents.* The epistle was well-timed; for Richelieu, still smarting from his recent mortification, agreed to give up Bayonne, where his regiment was quartered, and to forward the cause of the Spanish king in the southern provinces. With Madame du Maine's secret views, the duke was not acquainted: she attached, however, great value to his co-operation, and looked upon him as another Fiesche, conspiring in the midst of pleasure.

The Marquis of Pompadour, blindly devoted to Philip V., an adventurer, named the Abbé Brigaut, and the Marquis of Laval, of the noble house of Montmorency—whom his ani-

mosity against the regent, more than his zeal for Madame du Maine, induced to act as her coachman whenever she visited Cellamare—also entered into her plans from motives of personal ambition. Such varied elements of action promised nothing but confusion. The conspirators spoke of a war between France and Spain, concluded that the regent would take the command of the army, fixed on the camp he was to occupy, and talked of carrying him off thence to the castle of Toledo. On this chimerical basis rested the whole plot. Its chief results, in case of success, were to be the deposition of the regent, the aggrandisement of the Duke of Maine, and of a few ambitious partisans, a civil war, and the introduction of a foreign foe. But Madame du Maine had often declared, "that those who had once been princes of the blood, and who with that title possessed the right of succession to the crown, ought to rouse and convulse the whole kingdom sooner than fall from this high rank."

The plot was, however, prematurely discovered, through the imprudence of one of Cellamare's secretaries; who one evening excused himself to his mistress for having delayed his visit, by stating that he had been engaged all day in transcribing important despatches to be sent to Spain. The circumstance soon reached Dubois; he caused the despatches to be seized; they fully incriminated Cellamare and his friends. The ambassador was immediately arrested, as well as Richelieu, Brigaut, Pompadour, and Laval; who were sent to the Bastile. It has been asserted that Dubois and the regent suppressed the strongest proofs against the Duke and Duchess of Maine, and only produced those necessary to justify their apprehension. Before causing Madame du Maine to be arrested, the regent induced the Duke of Bourbon—who, though her nephew, was also her most active enemy—to allow her to be imprisoned in the castle of Dijon, of which he was then governor. The regent's object was to find a secure and distant prison for Madame du Maine, whose spirit and energy rendered her a dangerous captive; and, by placing her under the custody of her own nephew, to impress on the

public mind the reality of her guilt, without the necessity of a trial: which her sex and high rank would have rendered embarrassing.

Though conscious of their approaching arrest, the Duchess of Maine and her husband shewed no uneasiness: they received visitors as usual, and the festivities of Sceaux were not even interrupted. On the evening of the 17th of December 1718, Madame du Maine supped with her friend the Marquis d'Ancenis, captain of the guards; the next morning he entered her apartment at an early hour, and informed her that it was his disagreeable duty to make her his prisoner. The duchess pettishly asked why he had wakened her up so early, and, after some demur, prepared to accompany him. She was at first led to believe that Fontainebleau, or some other royal palace, would be her residence; but when she saw herself conveyed to the castle of Dijon, to be kept there under the custody of her own nephew, her rage knew no bounds. She wept and raved by turns, demanding if this was all the respect paid to her rank. When this fit of passion had subsided, she suddenly submitted to her fate, and played cards all the day long with those persons of her suite who had been allowed to accompany her.

Mademoiselle de Launay was not of the number; she was confined in the Bastile with her faithful maid, who had insisted on sharing her captivity. The Duchess of Bourbon, mother of Madame du Maine, had vainly asked that her daughter might be allowed the society of her favourite femme de chambre. Madame, whose intercession she had requested in this matter, indignantly replied, "That Mademoiselle de Launay was a great intrigante, who had conducted the whole affair; that she was in the Bastile, and deserved to remain there." Mademoiselle de Launay expiated the honour of having been in the confidence of a princess, by a close imprisonment of a year and a half. Her chief amusements, during the first months of her captivity, were the study of the Latin language, and the gambols of a cat and her kittens; which the rats that infested her room had compelled her to

ask for, notwithstanding her previous dislike of animals. She also spoke from her window to Richelieu, who was incarcerated in a different part of the fortress, and, with true French insouciance, they gaily sang together airs from the opera of Iphigenia. M. de Maison-Rouge, lieutenant of the Bastile, was secretly smitten with his fair captive. In order to divert her ennui, he induced her to enter into a playful correspondence with one of her fellow-prisoners, the Chevalier de Ménil; who was indirectly implicated in the Cellamare conspiracy, by having been the depositor of the Abbé Brigaut's papers. Maison-Rouge undertook to be the bearer of their letters, which only ran on the most trifling subjects; and he carried the complaisance so far as to procure them a few interviews. The result, under such romantic circumstances, was a mutual attachment. The imprudent lieutenant soon perceived the state of Mademoiselle de Launay's feelings; but, though he felt deeply grieved, he was too generous to profit by his power. He continued to favour occasional interviews between the lovers, and even to be the messenger of their correspondence. Though Mademoiselle de Launay's love for the chevalier appears to have been very sincere, the letters in which it is expressed do not convey the impression of a deep or fervent affection. The style is invariably cold, precise, and elegant, and notwithstanding the occasional tenderness of the sentiments, it is difficult not to think with the Chevalier de Ménil, that the feelings of the writer resided chiefly in her brain. Mademoiselle de Launay proved, however, more constant than the chevalier; for though his passion at first seemed very ardent, it cooled as he became accustomed to the romance of their intercourse. On leaving the Bastile, he proved entirely faithless, and married another.

Whilst love was thus beguiling the tedious hours of Mademoiselle de Launay's captivity, her royal mistress became so heartily weary of confinement, as to make her submission to the regent. She wrote him a letter in which she confessed her guilt, and, as she felt protected by her sex, laid the whole

blame on herself, and completely exonerated her husband. Though she spared her intimate friends, she heartlessly signalised her other accomplices to the regent's notice. Amongst those whom she betrayed were Pompadour, whom she treated with great contempt; Laval, Cellamare, and several of the Breton nobles. This letter, which was read in the regent's assembled council, has remained as an indelible stain on the character of the weak and selfish princess. Though she thus regained her freedom, Madame du Maine was highly indignant to see herself exposed: even whilst reaping the benefit of her treachery, she wished to be spared the shame it so fully deserved. Her husband was liberated about the same time; he feigned great anger at the imprudent conduct of his wife, and refused to see her. Madame du Maine begged of the regent to intercede for her with him; as he was not the dupe of the comedy they were acting, he ironically replied, that her power over her husband must be greater than his: she took this for a compliment, and, springing up from her seat, kissed him on both cheeks in spite of his resistance. Before six months were over, the Duke of Maine had forgiven his wife; they resumed their former mode of existence, and the little court of Sceaux was soon as gay as ever.

The prisoners of inferior rank were more harshly treated: Laval, in particular, who never forgave Madame du Maine. On seeing the conspiracy discovered, the Cardinal of Polignac had sought an interview with the regent, to whom he solemnly protested his innocence. The prince, who only felt contempt for his weak character, merely exiled him to his Abbaye of Anchin, where the disappointed politician resumed the composition of his Latin poem. De Mêsmes wished to adopt a similar course, and assuring Mademoiselle de la Chausseraie that he was entirely guiltless, induced her to procure him a meeting with the regent, over whom she possessed some influence. When the president had repeatedly asserted his innocence, the prince, who had heard him in silence, suddenly shewed him the proofs of his guilt in his own handwriting, and left him with visible indignation. Mademoiselle de la

Chausseraie's intercession alone saved the culprit from the punishment his duplicity deserved.

Although the regent asserted that he had four times more proof than he needed, in order to cause the Duke of Richelieu to be beheaded for high treason, the ambitious young nobleman was not punished with more than a three months' imprisonment in the Bastile. Mademoiselle de Valois obtained his freedom from her father, by consenting to marry the Duke of Modena. Even his captivity proved gratifying to Richelieu's vanity; for, when it was known that the governor had allowed him to walk daily on the bastion of the fortress, ladies of rank deserted the Cours-la-Reine, and thronged in their carriages to the Boulevards, in order to catch a glimpse of the handsome prisoner. The unhappy Brètons suffered most: several of their leaders were publicly executed, while the rest expiated in exile their dream of provincial independence.

Mademoiselle de Launay was liberated several months later than her mistress. This was owing to the honourable reluctance she felt to reveal anything likely to compromise Madame du Maine and her friends. When she was insidiously assured that the duchess authorised her to tell all she knew, she coolly replied, that if captivity had injured Madame du Maine's understanding, it had not produced the same effect upon her; and that, not having been intrusted with any matter of importance, she had nothing to say. It was only on receiving a private message from Madame du Maine, that Mademoiselle de Launay at length consented to disclose a few insignificant circumstances already known to the regent; the more important questions addressed to her she eluded with much prudence and sagacity. As her submission was what the regent chiefly wanted, he soon ordered her to be liberated. Though Madame du Maine had not forgotten her favourite attendant during their long separation, and had even personally interceded with the Duke of Orleans in order to obtain her freedom, she received her with more coldness than might have been anticipated: to judge, at least, from Mademoiselle de Launay's account. "I arrived at Sceaux in the evening;

Madame du Maine was at the promenade. I went to meet her in the garden. She saw me, caused her calèche to stop, and said, 'Ah! there is Mademoiselle de Launay; I am glad to see you.' I approached, she embraced me, and went on." Such was Mademoiselle de Launay's welcome, after a captivity of a year and a half, endured for the sake of her mistress. Notwithstanding this cold and transparent selfishness, the duchess soon restored her confidence, and as much affection as she was capable of feeling, to Mademoiselle de Launay. Her position was no longer that of femme de chambre; and the honourable firmness she had displayed in the cause of Madame du Maine, made her be considered as a personal friend, and drew her universal consideration. At the same time her want of birth and rank still subjected her to so many annoyances and humiliations, that she resolved to marry for the sake of acquiring a position in the world. As the Chevalier de Ménil had proved inconstant, she determined to bestow her hand on M. de Maison-Rouge, who was still devotedly attached to her, and whose noble character she fully appreciated; but he unfortunately died before the project could be fulfilled. Several years after this event, Madame du Maine married her protégée to the Baron of Staal, a Swiss officer in the French service. This marriage, which was strictly one of convenance on either side, proved, however, tolerably happy, and gave Madame de Staal a rank in the household of the duchess.

The political part of Madame de Maine ended with her captivity. However much her ambitious spirit might long for new intrigues, the policy of the regent, in marrying one of his daughters to the Prince of Asturias and betrothing the Infanta to Louis XV., destroyed her last chance of disturbing the kingdom by seeking the aid of Spain. Her power had never rested on a sufficiently broad principle to resist this attack: it was based on narrow court intrigues, and did not even possess the sympathy of those who conspired with her: each had his own private views, which impaired the unity of the plot. Even if it had not been discovered by accident, the Cellamare conspiracy must have proved a

failure: it had none of the elements of success or popularity.

Though the little court of Sceaux continued to be the resort of many celebrated and remarkable individuals, it was never again so brilliant as it had been during the first years of the regency. Disappointed ambition had soured the temper of the duchess, whilst the activity of her mind, wasted on trifles, added to the ennui which marked her life. To destroy the comfort of others, to complain of her melancholy fate, and carry her ennui everywhere with her, seemed henceforth the destiny of the once gay princess. But the world, which had treated her youthful caprices with indulgence, proved more severe as she advanced in life, and partly justified her complaints, by forsaking her. Though these circumstances caused her literary influence to decline, it was more real and more lasting than her political power. If she gave no new impulse to genius, she assisted its development, and had enough taste to feel the superiority of Voltaire, when the envy of his contemporaries proclaimed him inferior to Crebillon. The chief merit of Madame du Maine did not consist, however, in her appreciation of genius, but in having contributed to give a *style* to conversation. The purity, clearness, and elegance which marked her own language, became characteristic of her little court. The delightful memoirs of Madame de Staal are indeed calculated to give a high idea of the wit and talents of the visitors of Sceaux. They are written with singular elegance, and display a tact, judgment, and knowledge of the world, evidently acquired by long intercourse with a polite and refined society.

At the same time it must be confessed that, notwithstanding many points in her character which command esteem, it is difficult to imagine a more cold and unpoetical personage than Madame de Staal. Any feeling like tenderness, enthusiasm, or fervour, was evidently foreign to her nature. It is alleged, that, when Fontenelle asked her if her memoirs were to be very faithful, she replied that she did not intend drawing a full-length portrait of herself, and would only give her

bust to the public. But, though she may have concealed some circumstances of her life, the narrative she has left of it affords a very clear knowledge of her character. The heartless manner in which her marriage was conducted, the candour of her regret not to have married old M. Dacier, when she learns that he died so shortly after the period fixed for their intended union, are such clear indications of selfishness, as would greatly lessen the reader's sympathy, were it not unjust to make Madame de Staal bear the sole blame of the vices of the age and of the world in which she lived.

With all its wit, politeness, and refinement, the little society of Sceaux ever remained cold and heartless. There was no other link between its members than ennui and the desire of amusement: they were acquaintances, not friends. The authors received amongst them belonged, with few exceptions, to that class of writers whose ephemeral compositions seldom outlive the epoch of their birth. The cold brilliancy of style and egotism of the favourite poets of Sceaux, render it hopeless to look for some trace of a high or noble feeling amongst their forgotten productions. Their scepticism itself was too heartless to admit those lofty and generous aspirations, which, with so many faults and errors, nevertheless characterised the philosophy of the eighteenth century. This frivolousness was partly the cause that, though so long in existence, the society of Madame du Maine left few tokens of its being, when it had once been dissolved by the death of the duchess. Its members dispersed, and joined new coteries; but no work of genius, fostered under their care, has remained. Allusions in contemporary records, and the graceful memoirs of Madame de Staal, are the only traces now left of that once brilliant assemblage; which, for splendour and elegance, was then unrivalled, and only wanted women of heart and men of genius.

CHAPTER III.

THE COUNTESS OF VERRUE—MADAME DE LAMBERT—STATE OF FRENCH SOCIETY DURING THE REGENCY AND THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING IT—THE NUN TENCIN—MADAME DE PRIE.

> "Ci-git, dans une paix profonde,
> Cette *Dame de Volupté*,
> Qui, pour plus de sureté,
> Fit son paradis dans ce monde."

SUCH was the epitaph, composed by herself, which the Countess of Verrue, one of the most beautiful and accomplished women of Parisian society, desired to have engraved on her tombstone. and in those four lines lies embodied all the epicurean philosophy of the regency.

The *Dame de Volupté*, as she was now named by her friends, had once been a pure and lovely woman. She belonged to the proud and ancient family of Luynes, and she was early married to the Count of Verrue, who took her to Turin. Her great beauty attracted the attention of Amedée Victor, Duke of Savoy and King of Sicily. She long resisted his addresses, with a constancy and virtue rare for the age in which she lived. The persecution of her husband's relatives, whose protection she implored in vain, and the temptation of ruling over a court where her virtue only excited ridicule, at length proved stronger than her scruples: she became the mistress of the prince. His love was very ardent and sincere: it only increased with years; and it ended by heartily wearying Madame de Verrue. The children she had by her lover, the power she exercised at his court, the wealth she enjoyed, could not fix her affections. She eloped from Turin with her

brother, the Chevalier de Luynes, who assisted her escape. A great quantity of valuable medals disappeared with her from the duke's palace: part were sold in England, to a member of the royal family, and part to Madame, in Paris; where the faithless countess established herself. She led an elegant and luxurious life, suited to her profession of faith. She was rich, prodigal, and spent upwards of a hundred thousand livres a year on curiosities and rare books, which she never read. Her library was, in plays and novels, the most complete a private person had yet possessed. She loved company, when it was, like herself, brilliant, voluptuous, and sceptical. Voltaire admired and flattered her; she contracted a close intimacy with the poet La Faye, whom she often assisted in his compositions. It is said that she never spoke of her former lover, of her children, or expressed the least regret for the step she had taken,—a step which, be it understood, did not spring from principle. Her epitaph was a true index to her character. She was generally considered attractive and agreeable; and was probably as much so as a heartless woman, without love, faith, or purity, can ever be.

Another lady already alluded to, the Marchioness of Lambert, known by some agreeable and sensible productions, also opened her house to the wits of the day. Every Tuesday she received her friends. She was rich, amiable, though no longer young; her table was excellent, and she ranked amongst the few women who never permitted any gambling to take place beneath their roof. La Mothe, Fontenelle, Mairan, Mademoiselle de Launay, and Madame du Maine, were her principal friends. Her influence was quiet, but considerable. She confessed to D'Argenson that she could name whom she liked to the French Academy, and it was known that no member was ever elected without her consent. This bureau d'esprit was one of the first established in the eighteenth century. It took the tone and character of the lady by whom it was presided over, and was, accordingly, more decorous than brilliant. Madame de Lambert being strictly devout, and a close observer of the *convenances*, her society was only an assembly of wits; it had

none of the features of the bureaux d'esprit where the philosophers subsequently held their meetings.

Several other ladies exercised a similar influence. Madame de Lassay, the witty wife of a witty husband, was held in high favour at the court of Madame du Maine; Madame de Simiane, the accomplished grand-daughter of Madame de Sévigné, might, had she only been more wealthy, have taken a place amongst the influential ladies of the day. From Madame de Verrue down to the least important of the women then in repute, there was, however, no circle which could compare with the two great societies of Madame du Maine and the nun Tencin. Madame du Maine is already known to the reader. We shall speak of Madame de Tencin presently.

The coteries over which women presided did not absorb all the social faculties of the Parisian world. Many men, not choosing to submit to female influence, resorted to the two famous cafés of Gradet and Procope; which then enjoyed a grave and learned reputation. There might be seen daily J. B. Rousseau, the unhappy and guilty poet; Boindin, the atheist; the observant and satirical Duclos; Piron, La Mothe, and a host of philosophic authors; amongst whom often appeared the brilliant and universal Voltaire. Their discussions were chiefly bitter attacks, more or less disguised, against society and religion; and though the regent was too careless to persecute them for their opinions, he was often compelled to do so by the prejudices of a world which was intolerant, without having either faith or morality. These philosophic sceptics, the precursors of the encyclopædists, were, however, greatly outnumbered by such epicureans as the Dame de Volupté; who, reckless of the future, only wished to spend the present in luxurious indifference.

This easy scepticism was often united to the grossest credulity: Philip of Orleans seemed to have imparted his own mingled atheism and superstition to the whole nation. The wild fables of the Rosicrucians, with their enthusiastic dreams of elementary spirits, still found eager dupes. Amongst other adventurers, an individual, who took the name of Saint

Maurice, persuaded a large number of wealthy and titled individuals that he could enable them to hold communication with sylphs, gnomes, salamanders, and ondines. The disciples met, on stated days, in a darkened room, where Saint Maurice, acting as high priest, addressed a cabalistic invocation to the genie Alaël. When it was over, he went round the apartment, and received from each individual present a sealed note, containing a request addressed to the spirit. The notes being all collected, Saint Maurice approached the altar, and seemed to cast them into a burning brazier; but the notes he threw in had all been prepared beforehand for the purpose, and he carefully preserved the real ones, in order to frame verbal replies which he might deliver to his adepts on their next meeting. The credulous dupes took it for granted that, as the answers they received always had some reference to their requests, there really existed an intercourse between Alaël and Saint Maurice. This induced them to grant more readily the demands for large sums, which the omnipotent genie often addressed to them through his high priest. The police put an end to the whole matter, by throwing Saint Maurice into the Bastile.

This feverish thirst for excitement greatly favoured the introduction of Law's financial system. The country was on the eve of a bankruptcy, when the adventurous Scotchman proposed to the regent to supply the deficiencies of the treasury by a paper currency. The Duke of Orleans entered eagerly into this scheme, which had the most astonishing success. A gambling spirit seemed to have suddenly seized on the whole nation: pleasures and intrigues were forgotten in the absorbing pursuit of wealth. The sudden rise of fortunes increased the growing sense of equality. Law himself, as though conscious of his paramount importance, behaved with haughty insolence to the nobles who waited for hours in his antechambers. Birth and rank daily yielded more to wealth. Women entered eagerly into all the intrigues which were then carried on in order to obtain Mississippi shares. Elegant and high-born ladies could be seen standing in the cobbler's stall

of the Rue Quincampoix, waiting with unwearied patience for the favourable moment to approach the shrine of Plutus. The instance of Madame de Boucher, who caused her coachman to upset her before Law's door, thus to obtain the interview he had refused to grant her, was by no means a rare example of the length to which these female stock-jobbers were prepared to go in order to carry their point. Some, faithful to their old system, intrigued to enrich their friends. The Countess of Verrue and the Marchioness of Lassai resolved to make the fortune of the Abbé Terrasson, known for his deep learning and great simplicity. They procured for him about eight or nine hundred thousand *livres* of Law's notes; the abbé having gravely assured them that he could not trust himself with more than a million. In order to prove the excellence of Law's system, he wrote a work upon it, which appeared the very day that the system began to decline. On seeing his fortune lost for the second time in his life, the abbé merely observed, —"Thank Heaven! I am now again out of trouble." This trait of naïveté made Madame de Lassai exclaim, that only a man of much wit could be so foolish.

France did not recover for a long time from the failure of Law's disastrous scheme; and it was only when the excitement caused by it had entirely subsided, that literary productions once more absorbed public attention. The literature of that period is chiefly of a light and frivolous character; for, persons of rank of both sexes being then almost equally idle and averse to heavy works, tales and novels became the vehicle through which the gravest writers were compelled to submit their ideas to the public. Montesquieu frankly confessed that some of his works had been written for frizzled and powdered heads; and in order to insure the success of his admirable satire, "The Persian Letters," he was compelled to give it the form of a novel. From this necessity resulted that singular mixture of philosophy and romance which characterises the productions of the period. The tales of Marivaux, in particular, shew the analytic tendency of the times. Every emotion of the heroine, or secret spring of action, is explained

with tedious exactness; and the most frivolous coquette enters into as detailed an account of her feelings as might be given by any metaphysical Helvetius. The traces of this philosophic spirit are everywhere to be met with; and we find the eloquent Massillon, when addressing the youthful Louis XV. in the chapel of Versailles, reminding him of the election of kings, and of the rights of the people.

But, notwithstanding the efforts of philosophers, the great majority of the society on whom they sought to inculcate their doctrines remained essentially frivolous. During a whole season, nothing was so fashionable, for both men and women, as to cut up costly engravings, and stick the mutilated figures on fans and fire-screens; to make up ribbon knots came next in vogue; the childish game of cup-and-ball was also one of the favourite amusements of this indolent aristocracy. Some noblemen sought to distinguish themselves by the singularity of their conduct. The Duke of Gesvres kept open house during a fit of illness. Forty persons daily sat down at his table; only about twenty of his privileged courtiers, whom he had presented with splendid green suits, were admitted into his presence. They found him in a magnificent apartment, richly dressed in green, reclining on a couch, and making up ribbon knots. Another nobleman, the Duke of Epernon, placed his delight in surgical operations; and, by mingled threats and promises, compelled his unhappy vassals to let him exercise his skill upon them.

Women rendered themselves conspicuous for the eagerness with which they entered into all these frivolous amusements. The celebrated singers, Mademoiselle le Pélissier and Mademoiselle le Maure, divided the court ladies into two rival parties, each of which spared no effort to insure the success of its favourite, by crushing her rival. Amongst the women whose intellect and taste rendered them, however, superior to such trifling occupations, a few were remarkable for the tact and discernment with which they gradually drew around them some of the most eminent men of the day. Of these coteries, for such they were, none was more

agreeable than that presided over by Madame de Tencin, the ex-nun.

This clever, handsome, and unprincipled woman had been compelled by her father to take the veil at an early age, and to enter the convent of the Augustines of Montfleuri. The gay and worldly life led by the inmates of this sacred asylum, which stood at the end of a fashionable promenade in the town of Grenoble, had long been a source of scandal to the faithful. The austere Cardinal le Camus vainly sought to effect a lasting reform: his admonitions were unheeded by the recluses, who daily received a large and brilliant company, consisting of the young and gay of both sexes. The visitors of the convent did not remain long unconscious of the attractions, both mental and personal, of Mademoiselle de Tencin. She was, however, rather fascinating than strictly beautiful; and there was something feline and unpleasant, at first, in her half-closed eyes; but that seeming languor and indolence contrasted so strikingly with the vivacity of her wit, as to add greatly to the irresistible charm of her whole appearance. Her manners were pliant and insinuating; her tact was unerring. She never seemed conscious of her own attractions, but practised the sure flattery of appearing absorbed by whatever others said and did. The fascination which she exercised over the abbess and her confessor procured her unusual freedoms: she was allowed to receive private visits, and to leave the convent, in order to return them, as often as she pleased. But the more she saw of the world, from which she was shut out for ever by her vows, the more her ambitious and intriguing spirit, which already revealed to her the advantages she might derive from her wit and beauty, made her long to enter its forbidden precincts. She adroitly learned from her religious director the steps by which she might regain her freedom. She then protested against her vows, and succeeded in being transferred to the Chapter of Neuville: the obligation of celibacy was the only one under which she still laboured; the freedom enjoyed by the sisters of her order, during the last century, being sufficiently noto-

rious. Some time after this, the young canoness went to Paris to reside with her brother, the Abbé de Tencin. Report said that various scandalous adventures, of which she was the heroine, had compelled her to take this step.

Madame de Tencin, for she henceforth took that name, was soon surrounded by host of admirers; amongst the most assiduous were Bolingbroke, then in France, and Fontenelle. The latter was so thoroughly fascinated, that, though in general little disposed to exert himself in favour of his friends, he procured Madame de Tencin's freedom from the papal court, according to her ardent wish. Being now released from every monastic tie, she became more imprudent in her conduct: she had several notorious intrigues; and, amongst the rest, one with Canon-Destouches, which ended in the birth of a son, who was exposed on the steps of the church of Saint Jean-le-Rond, on the 17th of November 1717. The child, thus forsaken by its heartless mother, was found and brought up by a poor glazier's wife, named Rousseau, and proved to be the future great mathematician, D'Alembert. Though it may be alleged that, residing as she did in the house of her brother, a priest, Madame de Tencin could not recognise her child without ruining all the abbé's future prospects of aggrandisement, she might, however, have provided for it; but the fear of future detection overbalanced every other consideration.

It was about this time that Madame de Tencin began to take an active share in her brother's political intrigues. After vainly trying to influence the regent, she stooped to Dubois, and entered into a degrading connexion with him, which her biographers have vainly sought to excuse by ascribing it to her sisterly affection. Dubois was incapable of loving her, or, indeed, any human being, but he admired her talents; and, at a time when Madame du Maine was enlisting society itself against the regent, he felt the value of Madame de Tencin's influence over the brilliant and select company which assembled at her brother's house. The abbé's easy conscience was also peculiarly acceptable: to him Dubois

intrusted the task of converting Law, when the Scotchman wished to abjure his original creed in order to become minister. De Tencin retired with his proselyte to Melun, in order to avoid the sarcasms of the Parisians: Law was said to have rewarded his complaisance by a large share of paper money. This accusation was strengthened by one of simony, which was proved against the Abbé de Tencin in his own handwriting, at the very moment that he offered to attest his innocence by oath. Though this disgraceful exposure occurred before the parliament of Paris, Dubois had, nevertheless, the effrontery to send the abbé to Rome in order to forward the negotiations relative to his cardinalship. The envoy was worthy of the task. The Abbé de Tencin signalised himself at Rome by his profligate and unprincipled conduct. He opened the letters which Roman prelates imprudently sent to Paris through the French ambassador, and commissioned his sister to seal them up again, and cause them to be delivered to the persons to whom they were addressed. Madame de Tencin was so careless of public opinion, that she communicated to Duclos, the historian, the correspondence between herself and her brother, in which these facts were recorded. When the Abbé de Tencin returned from Rome, he was rewarded with the archbishopric of Embrun: he aimed, however, at the cardinal's hat; but the death of Dubois put an end to his hopes of favour, and threw him and his sister once more into the shade.

In 1723, six months after the death of his corrupt minister, the regent was suddenly carried off by a fit of apoplexy. In the shock and confusion which followed this event, the young king was easily persuaded, by interested counsellors, to name his kinsman, the Duke of Bourbon, prime minister. The passions of this prince were stronger than his judgment; they had rendered him the slave of the Marchioness of Prie, who henceforth governed in his name. This ambitious and violent woman, who was remarkable for her beauty, had first endeavoured to fascinate the regent; but on learning that he allowed his mistresses no political influence, she

directed all her powers of seduction towards the Duke of Bourbon. Her obscure origin affords another proof of the growing influence which had then been already acquired by wealth. Her father, Plenœuf, was a wealthy financier, whom his practical intelligence and unscrupulous conscience had raised from the lowest ranks to considerable affluence. His wife, who was celebrated for her wit, beauty, and intrigues, educated her daughter with great care, and prided herself on her dawning beauty, until she perceived that the young girl aimed at becoming her rival in the little court of adorers with which she was surrounded. The bitter and disgraceful hostility which henceforth existed between the mother and her child compelled M. Plenœuf to marry his daughter to the Marquess of Prie. Though the unnatural rivals were thus separated, their mutual hatred remained unabated.

The insolence and haughtiness of Madame de Prie, when her lover was at the head of affairs, knew no bounds. Her first act was to persecute with vindictive eagerness all the friends of her mother whom it was in her power to injure. Though Voltaire declares that she possessed

> "Un esprit juste, gracieux,
> Solide dans le sérieux,
> Et charmant dans les bagatelles,"

Madame de Prie was evidently incapable of directing the affairs of a kingdom. Her avidity was excessive: she not only received the large pension from England which had been granted to Dubois, but squandered money with the greatest extravagance, and urged her lover to raise the taxes: she directed the committee of finances herself, through the agency of her creatures, the brothers Pâris, whom she had raised to high posts in order to act under their name. Madame de Prie soon felt it was necessary that she should convince her lover of her great talents, so that she might become indispensable to him as minister as well as mistress, the general ambition of the French favourites of the eighteenth century. She adopted the following stratagem, well calculated to fulfil her purpose. Every financial project destined to be submitted to the prince

was first secretly concerted between his mistress and her agents. The compliant financiers purposely left in their written plans many errors, with which they took care to acquaint Madame de Prie. These errors passed undetected by the duke, whose talents were by no means first-rate. Madame de Prie of course discovered and rectified them at once. The brothers Pâris uttered well-feigned exclamations of admiration, recognised the profound judgment of Madame la Marquise, and hastened to adopt her suggestions as the wisest which could possibly have been made. The duke, amazed at the extraordinary intelligence of his clever mistress, congratulated himself on being able to receive her assistance. So great became her power, that, notwithstanding his own personal reluctance, she made him adopt the most exacting and arbitrary measures. Amongst other acts of tyranny attributed to her, is the renewal of the persecution against the Protestants: she had not even the excuse of bigotry for this act of intolerance, being an open and professed atheist. Her power over her lover was so great that, when he wished to marry Mademoiselle de Vermandois, his sister, to the young Louis XV., Madame de Prie, before giving her assent to the marriage, resolved to call in disguise on the princess, who was then in a convent, in order to ascertain whether she was likely to obtain over the king that empire necessary to her views and those of the Duke of Bourbon. She saw her, and was charmed with her wit and beauty, until she unfortunately asked her if she had ever heard of Madame de Prie, and what she thought of her. The reply of the young princess, reared up in conventual austerity, far from a corrupt court, was so candid, that Madame de Prie left the monastery highly incensed, and vowing that Mademoiselle de Vermandois should never be queen of France. But as both she and the Duke of Bourbon were anxious to see the king married, without waiting until the little infanta to whom he was betrothed should be of age, they chose Mary Leczinska, daughter of Stanislaus, the dethroned monarch of Poland, as his wife. Madame de Prie carefully impressed on the mind of the young queen, that to her she

was indebted for her crown; but though the timid Mary Leczinska acknowledged the obligation, she possessed so little influence over her husband that she could not consolidate the power of the marchioness, whose imperious temper soon caused her own ruin and that of her lover. Madame de Prie had long noticed, with secret displeasure, the influence which Fleury, the beloved preceptor of Louis XV., had obtained over his royal pupil; she signalised him to the Duke of Bourbon as a dangerous rival, whom it was absolutely necessary to banish from the king's presence. The duke was so imprudent as to obey this suggestion. On discovering that the Bishop of Fréjus was gone, Louis XV. fell into deep melancholy; but so little was he accustomed to the exercise of power that one of his courtiers, the Duke of Mortemart, was obliged to remind him, on seeing his grief, that he could recall Fleury if he wished. The king eagerly took the hint: Fleury came back from exile, and, prompted by his own personal fears, as well as by a sense of duty, he exposed to his pupil the arbitrary conduct of the Duke of Bourbon and of his mistress: they were immediately sent to different places of exile by order of the king. Madame de Prie bore her misfortune with fortitude, for the space of a week. At the end of that time she sank into a desponding state of mind, and died in 1727; of ennui, according to Voltaire, and of poison administered by herself, according to other accounts. Her brief power left no other traces in France than the hatred and contempt which long remained attached to her name.

Although the regency ends, strictly speaking, with the majority of Louis XV., which occurred before the death of the Duke of Orleans, the extreme youth of the king, and the facility with which he allowed himself to be guided by his counsellors, really prolonged that period for several years. The state of society, moreover, did not undergo any great modification, but remained almost the same under the regency, and the successive ministries of Dubois, the Duke of Orleans, the Duke of Bourbon, and Fleury, Bishop of Fréjus, who succeeded to the latter.

The preceptor of Louis XV. was no sooner in power, than the Archbishop of Embrun and Madame de Tencin, endeavoured to put themselves at the head of the religious party which again persecuted the Jansenists. De Tencin presided over the council of Embrun, which deposed the virtuous Bishop of Senez as guilty of heresy; whilst his sister so signalised herself by her zeal in that capital, that Fleury, who disliked religious discussions, sent her word to leave Paris. She obeyed; but was soon recalled, through the influence of her brother. The suicide of La Frenaye, which preceded this event, had already added new scandal to that associated with her name. This gentleman, who had been one of her favoured lovers, shot himself at her house, in a fit of jealousy or despair. In an incoherent document which he left behind him, he declared her to be the cause of his death. The accusation was taken in a literal sense, and Madame de Tencin was incarcerated in the Bastile. She was, however, soon released; for, though it was evident that she had behaved unjustifiably towards the unhappy La Frenaye, there did not exist the least proof of her supposed guilt.

Neither the scandal caused by this event, nor her total and notorious want of moral sense, seems, however, to have prevented Madame de Tencin from being well received in society. She was a profound dissembler, and those who knew her best could not resist the soothing charm of her manners. The writings with which she amused her old age, and which were published after her death, are calculated to give a high idea of her intellect, as well as of a delicacy and nobleness of mind contradicted by the whole tenor of her life. The close of the tale entitled, "Mémoires de Comminges" is exquisitely beautiful and pathetic; and, in the opinion of many readers, M. Villemain committed no exaggeration when he termed it sublime. The morality of her productions is, at the same time, of a conventional kind, like that of Madame de Genlis's novels: it reminds us of the writer, whose apparent gentleness and utter want of heart partly justified the Abbé Trublet's severe remark, when he once heard her mildness praised,

—"Ay, if she wanted to poison you, she would choose the mildest poison."

Madame de Tencin possessed a deep knowledge of human nature, especially of its evil side; and a keen perception of character, which can explain one source of her power: we easily govern that which we understand. Her observation respecting Fontenelle, that his heart was only a second brain, was singularly true and appropriate. One of her sayings has been repeated since under so many various forms as to deserve quotation:—"Clever people," she remarked, "often commit mistakes from not believing the world to be stupid enough, or as stupid as it is." It was not, however, through the charms of her intellect alone, or by tact and sagacity, that Madame de Tencin drew around her such men as Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Mairan, Helvetius, and Marivaux. With all her faults, she was capable of friendship, and almost as ready to intrigue for her acquaintances as for her brother and herself. One of the great seductions of her society was, that her wit never took a dictatorial aspect; her finesse itself was admirably veiled by an appearance of quiet simplicity and good sense. Few women understood so well as she did the art of gathering together men of the most varied tastes and opinions; of influencing them without letting them even suspect her power, and of exercising it for the enjoyment of all. However great her other faults might be, in this art she was at least sincere; and the intellectual pleasure she diffused around her was felt by none more keenly than by the clever and intriguing nun Tencin.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME DE FERRIOL—MADEMOISELLE AÏSSÉ.

Amongst the ladies who shared the privilege of presiding over an elegant and chosen society, was Madame de Ferriol, sister of Madame de Tencin; handsome and intriguing like her, but without her wit and suppleness. She was early married to M. de Ferriol, a magistrate, a gourmand, and a Moliniste, who cared little about his wife, and philosophically permitted her to have a long and open liaison with the Maréchal d'Uxelles.

This connexion with a minister added to Madame de Ferriol's power. Her house was frequented by all those who had favours to ask; every class and every party were represented in her society. The roués came there, with the volatile Madame de Parabère, mistress of their patron the regent. Young Madame du Deffand, whose wit and sparkling eyes had already created a sensation at the little court of Madame du Maine, occasionally deserted it for the Parisian circle presided over by the magistrate's wife. Pont-de-Veyle and D'Argental, Madame de Ferriol's two sons, introduced a few of their literary friends: amongst the rest young Arouet, now metamorphosed into Arouet de Voltaire. The presence of Maréchal d'Uxelles, and the relationship of his mistress to Madame de Tencin, attracted the restless exile Bolingbroke. He was generally accompanied by a very handsome, witty, and agreeable widow, named Madame de Villette, whom he afterwards acknowledged as his second wife.

As long as the Maréchal proved constant, his handsome mistress remained in vogue; but his love visibly cooled with age, and with the decline of her charms. Madame de Ferriol

had never been very witty, and she grew ill-tempered and morose with years. The world might have become, like the maréchal, indifferent and estranged, if the attractions she no longer possessed had not fortunately been supplied by the presence of a young and lovely Circassian slave, named Aïssé, whom she had brought up, and who resided beneath her roof.

The history of this unhappy and interesting girl is one of those romantic episodes which never appear to such advantage as when standing forth on the obscurity of a background like the regency. The truth and earnestness of the affection which united the beautiful Circassian and her devoted lover, the Chevalier d'Aydie, contrast so deeply with the heartlessness of the world around them, that posterity, disarmed of its severity, has almost learned to look upon their errors as virtues. The origin of the connexion between Mademoiselle Aïssé and her protectress was singular and romantic.

M. de Ferriol had an elder brother, who travelled a great deal in the East, and was sent on various diplomatic missions to Turkey, where he led a life of oriental despotism and licentiousness. He was in the habit of purchasing beautiful female slaves, two of whom he once brought to France: he kept one for himself, the other he gave to his friend, the Comte de Nogent, who was so deeply enamoured of her that he did not hesitate to make her his wife. M. de Ferriol's slave probably died young, for there is no other record of her fate save that she came to France with her master. In the year 1698, M. de Ferriol was passing through the slave-market at Constantinople, when he was struck with the surpassing loveliness of a young female child exposed for sale. He questioned her owner, and learned that the child had been carried off by the Turks from the palace of a Circassian prince, whom they had massacred with all his people: she was supposed to be his daughter, for her ravishers had found her surrounded by attendants. Moved with compassion at her unhappy fate, and also actuated by a less pure and disinterested motive, the French nobleman purchased the young

Haidée or Aïssé—the two names appear to be identical—for the sum of fifteen hundred livres. On returning to France, he confided the child to his sister-in-law, Madame de Ferriol, and then went back once more to Constantinople, where he resided as ambassador until the year 1711.

Aïssé, as she still continued to be called, although she had been baptized under the name of Charlotte, was kindly treated by Madame de Ferriol, by whom she was brought up on a footing of equality with her two sons. D'Argental and Pont-de-Veyle always loved their adopted sister very tenderly. The beauty of Mademoiselle Aïssé was remarkable, even in that age of beautiful women: it blended the passion and fire of the East with the classical outline of Grecian loveliness, and the animated grace of France. She was about the middle height, of an elegant figure and a graceful carriage; her complexion had, in youth, that dazzling bloom and transparent purity which is still the boast of the fine Circassian races; her eyes, dark, soft, and lustrous, shone with truly Eastern splendour; her oval and delicate countenance expressed the goodness, candour, and finesse of her character.

Aïssé attracted considerable attention in the circle of Madame de Ferriol: her extreme loveliness was not her only charm. If she was neither brilliant nor witty, she possessed, however, all the tact and delicacy of a fine nature: she spoke well, but little, for her disposition was naturally retiring. It is easy to judge of what her conversational powers may have been by the letters she has left. The style in which they are written, though natural and elegant, is frequently careless and incorrect: it has not that precision and purity of idiom which characterise Madame de Staal's language, nor the strength and wit of Madame du Deffand's. The merits of Mademoiselle Aïssé's writings are by no means literary; they spring from the truth and tenderness of her heart, from the natural humility and delicacy of her mind, and from the sincere and honest abhorrence she ever displays against the profligacy and vices of the age. It was this union of rare personal attractions and of the most noble and amiable

qualities of the heart which led a contemporary poet to exclaim—

"Aïssé de la Grèce épuisa la beauté;
Elle a de la France emprunté
Les charmes de l'esprit, de l'air, et du langage.
Pour le cœur je n'y comprends rien;
Dans quel lieu s'est-elle adressée?
Il n'en est plus comme le sien
Depuis l'âge d'or ou l'Astrée."

Aïssé was in all the bloom and freshness of her beauty when M. de Ferriol returned to France. He was on the verge of seventy; his protégée was barely seventeen. He endeavoured, nevertheless, to inspire her with a more tender feeling than gratitude; and when he failed entirely, he asserted his right over her in a tone of oriental despotism. He reminded her that she was his: that he had bought her; and he ended by pleading his love, and offering her a share in all his possessions. In order to escape this persecution, Aïssé appealed to her adopted brother, D'Argental, whose interference and remonstrances at length convinced her ancient admirer of the uselessness of his suit. M. de Ferriol consented to be reasonable, and to receive from Aïssé—all she could give—the affection and devotedness of a daughter. It was in this character that she remained with him until his death. If M. de Ferriol, notwithstanding his years, could not remain insensible to the grace and beauty of the young Circassian, others found the task equally difficult. Bolingbroke did not fall in love with her, probably because he knew that love would be unavailing; but in his letters he alludes, with evident affection and tenderness, to "the dear Circassian," and "the charming Aïssé;" declaring, "that he would sooner have found the secret of pleasing her than the quadrature of the circle."

The regent, who met Mademoiselle Aïssé at the house of his mistress, Madame de Parabère—such was the profligacy of the age, that none of the young girl's protectors objected to her intimacy with this abandoned woman—expressed his admiration in more explicit language. Stung and astonished

with her coldness, which only heightened his passion, he endeavoured to seduce her by the most brilliant offers. Aïssé firmly and indignantly refused; and from that time carefully shunned his presence. Madame de Ferriol learned, with much vexation, the scruples of the young girl, who had certainly not been reared in a very virtuous atmosphere. That she should have refused to become the mistress of her old brother-in-law was perfectly right and justifiable; but that the same reluctance should extend to the first prince of the blood and regent of the kingdom, was not to be conceived. Madame de Ferriol was ambitious; the Maréchal d'Uxelles was deserting her: might not Aïssé prove the stepping-stone to a new and more dazzling fortune than the first? She urged her to yield; she combated her arguments; she called her moral scruples folly; and exhorted her to do as all around her did. Aïssé was young, inexperienced, and pliable by nature. The world in which she had spent her youth was so corrupt that her sense of moral right or wrong was never fully developed. She gradually confessed the truth of Madame de Ferriol's reasoning; but, when her unworthy protectress thought herself assured of the wished-for triumph, another obstacle arose, —the young girl declined to become the mistress of the regent: no longer on moral grounds, but on the plea that she did not, and could never love him. Unlike the noble and freeborn ladies of France, the Circassian slave, bought in the market of Constantinople, inexorably refused to sell herself for gold or power. This time, all the reasoning of Madame de Ferriol could not vanquish the resistance of Aïssé. When the persecution she endured at length became intolerable, the young girl threw herself at the feet of her protectress, conjuring her, in the name of Heaven, to cease mentioning this hateful subject; and declaring, with unexpected vehemence, that if it were urged again she would retire to a convent. Madame de Ferriol, alarmed at a threat which would have deprived her society of its greatest attraction, sullenly desisted from her project, but never forgave Mademoiselle Aïssé this mortifying disappointment.

At the house of Madame du Deffand, already known for her wit, beauty, and equivocal conduct, Aïssé met a Knight of Malta, without either rank or wealth; but whose love she knew not how to resist, like that of the licentious Prince Regent. The Chevalier d'Aydie was young, brave, and handsome: a true hero of romance; with a disposition so loyal and so noble, that even the sceptical Voltaire called him, "Le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche." The young knight no sooner beheld Mademoiselle Aïssé than he became deeply enamoured. She returned his love: there existed only one obstacle to this deep and mutual passion. The parents of the Chevalier d'Aydie, who were as poor as they were noble, had early compelled him to enter the military order of the Knights of Saint John. He had, several years before their first meeting, taken the vows which bound him to lead a life of celibacy. It was then, in the struggle which conscience a while maintained against passion, that all the fatal arguments of Madame de Ferriol recurred to the mind of Aïssé. She yielded to their force; and her protectress, satisfied at the humiliation of a virtue which had been a silent reproach to her own misconduct, openly sanctioned, between her ward and the Chevalier d'Aydie, a connexion which was only treated as a matter of course by the society in which they moved. Repentance and shame entered the soul of Aïssé too late. With the connivance of Madame de Villette, who feigned to take her to England, whilst she left her in a retired quarter of Paris, she gave birth to a daughter, unsuspected. Her child was afterwards placed in a provincial convent, where she passed under the name of Miss Black, niece of Lord Bolingbroke. But though appearances, which were still of paramount importance in that corrupt world, were thus saved, the sense of shame and degradation never left Mademoiselle Aïssé's mind, naturally too pure and delicate for the errors into which her unhappy education had made her fall.

The birth of their child only increased the passion of the Chevalier d'Aydie. He had already offered his mistress to procure a dispensation from the Pope, and marry her; but

she had steadily refused: her unknown origin, the poverty of her lover, and the prejudices of the age, which would have rendered such an alliance degrading for him, made her persist in her refusal, even when she became a mother. In the excess of his passion, the chevalier vainly entreated Aïssé to fly with him to the solitude of some remote land, where they might live in peace and happiness: she firmly declined. At this distance of time it is difficult to understand and appreciate her scruples: they were probably strengthened by the destiny of the Comte de Nogent, who, having imprudently married the beautiful slave, brought, like her, from Constantinople by M. de Ferriol, had, in consequence, been subjected to the most bitter insults. The dread of entailing a similar fate on her lover made Mademoiselle Aïssé disinterestedly sacrifice her own hopes of felicity to his honour. "However much happiness it might be for me to become his wife," she mournfully wrote to her friend Madame Calandrini, "I must love the chevalier for himself. What would the world say, if he married an unknown dependant on the family of Ferriol? I value his honour too highly, and I am too proud to let him commit this folly. Would the chevalier always think as he does now? He might repent; and then, indeed, I should die of grief at the thought of having caused his unhappiness,—at the thought, more bitter still, of being no longer loved."

Madame Calandrini, whom she thus addressed, was a lady of much piety and virtue, residing at Geneva, and who had endeavoured to awaken Aïssé to a sense of her error. She succeeded; for the young girl's soul was naturally pure and good. But the affection she had conceived for the chevalier was no transient love: the struggle between passion and duty was long and full of bitterness. The ill-temper of Madame de Ferriol, to whose house she returned after the death of the old ambassador, added to Aïssé's sorrow. No duty, no obedience, however entire, could please the woman whom, notwithstanding all her faults, Aïssé considered as the benefactress of her youth. Stolen visits to the convent where her child was brought up, and the affection of the chevalier, would

have consoled her, if she could have indulged in that affection without the sense of sin. Though oppressed with remorse, she strove against her feelings in vain. "Alas!" as she again wrote to Madame Calandrini, "I have not the courage of being courageous. Reason, your counsel, and Divine grace itself, are not so strong as my passion." And she ingenously strove to justify that passion to her friend and to her own heart. "The chevalier loved her so tenderly, that it would be ingratitude not to return his love. Was she not bound to do so for the sake of their child?"

Madame Calandrini pitied her friend, consoled her, but continued her exhortations. Aïssé admitted their truth, but delayed the dreaded period which should place an eternal bar between her and the man she loved. "Perhaps," she sadly and humbly observed—hoping, when hope there was none—"God will, after all, have mercy on us. Alas! I have hard struggles to go through. I have had them all my life. I reproach myself—ah! why were you not Madame de Ferriol? You would have taught me to love virtue. . . . I knew you much too late. You alone developed my soul: it was destined to be virtuous."

"I am always remembering," she observed on another occasion, "the conversation we had in your room. I make efforts which kill me. . . . . Happy are those whose virtue enables them to triumph over a similar weakness! To break through the bonds of a most violent passion, of a most tender and justifiable friendship, such is my fate. It is terrible. Can death be worse? and yet you wish me to do it. I will; but I doubt that I can survive it. I fear to return to Paris: I fear whatever brings me nearer to the chevalier, and I am unhappy to be far from him. I know not what I wish. Oh, why," she despairingly adds,—"why may not my passion be permitted? why is it not innocent?"

When Mademoiselle Aïssé wrote this, she had already been attached to the Chevalier d'Aydie for several years; but time, instead of weakening, had strengthened their affection. Its depth and sincerity rendered her struggle very bitter. Her

health soon sank under the weight of her sorrow, which was increased by the despair the chevalier felt when he thought himself on the point of losing her. "Every one," she wrote, when she had partly recovered, "pitied him. Indeed, madame, you would have wept as I did. He had a mortal fear lest I should die. His grief and sadness were so great, that I had to console him, and to conceal my sufferings from him as much as I could. His eyes were always filled with tears. I did not dare to look at him. Madame de Ferriol asked me one day if I had bewitched him? I answered, the charm which I used was to love against my own will, and to render his life as happy as I could."

It was the bond of an affection so true, so tender, and so constant, which Aïssé had now to sever. She accomplished her task mournfully, but without weakness. The Chevalier d'Aydie had been well aware of Madame Calandrini's efforts to reclaim his mistress. He never sought to oppose that lady's influence, but in the most touching terms he besought Aïssé not to deprive him of her love. He renewed his offer of marriage, which she again declined. The dread of alienating him for ever made her long delay her resolve; but that fear at length yielded to conscience, and she accordingly announced to the Chevalier d'Aydie, that friendship must henceforth be the only feeling between them. Her sorrow was too evident, and he loved her too well, to indulge in useless remonstrances or reproaches. He submitted to her decision, not without grief, but resignedly; protesting that her affection, whatever name she might give it, would ever be his only source of happiness, and promising never to seek to influence her against the dictates of her conscience. He religiously kept his word; and, though years of mingled sorrow and remorse had faded the numberless charms which had first enchanted him, his love for his Circassian mistress ever remained fervent and true. In the sincerity of that affection, he made her the whimsical proposal that, when their years were such as to justify such a course, without giving rise to scandal, they should both reside under the same roof, and spend the end

of their life together; thus realising in their old age the unavailing dream and longing of their youth. Mademoiselle Aïssé smiled and wept as she heard him; for she knew she would never live to see even that second dream fulfilled.

She ardently desired to consecrate her penitence by confessing her sins to a priest; but Madame de Ferriol would not probably have sanctioned such a step, and Aïssé was now too weak to go even to the neighbouring church. A plot to enable her to carry her desire into effect was accordingly concerted between the chevalier, Madame du Deffand, and Madame de Parabère. The latter lady called on her friend, and took her in her carriage to the house of Madame du Deffand, where a clergyman had been brought by the Chevalier d'Aydie. This solemn reconciliation of her soul to God, gave Aïssé a peace of mind she had never known till then. The weary strife was over, the bitter cup was quaffed, and she felt spiritually strengthened and purified by its wholesome bitterness. Her conscience was at rest; the chevalier loved her still; she might love him without feeling burdened by the sense of sin or shame. But this happiness—for happiness it would have been—came too late. The strength of life and youth had been spent in the long struggle against passion. Signs she could not mistake soon told Aïssé that her life was drawing to a close.

She had suffered too much not to feel resigned; but she scarcely dared to contemplate the chevalier's grief. As though he could by his gifts have hoped to win back the life of a being so beloved, he was constantly heaping presents on every one around her. But love availed not against death, and each day brought Aïssé nearer to the term of her existence. A few days before her end, she thus addressed Madame Calandrini, for the last time: "The life I have led has been very wretched. Have I ever had an instant's joy? I could never be with myself. I dreaded to think. Remorse never abandoned me from the time that I opened my eyes to the extent of my errors. Why, then, should I dread the separation of my soul, since I feel convinced that God is all good-

ness, and that my real happiness shall date from the moment when I leave this miserable body?"

After a long and painful illness, Mademoiselle Aïssé died on the 13th of March 1733. She was buried in the vault which the family of Ferriol possessed in the church of Saint Roch. Within the narrow circle where she had shed the charm of her gentle presence, her death was deeply felt; for, if others were admired, she was loved. Madame de Parabère, who had attended on her during her sickness with the devotedness of a sister, long mourned her loss; which was lamented even by the selfish Madame du Deffand. Sophie, her maid, inconsolable at the death of her gentle mistress, entered a convent. The sorrow of the Chevalier d'Aydie was the most bitter and lasting. Though he survived the woman he had loved, for many years, he never ceased to cherish her memory. He retired to the country, and devoted himself to the education of his daughter; whose dazzling beauty vividly recalled her mother, such as she was when he beheld her first at Madame du Deffand's—young, beautiful, and happy.

With Mademoiselle Aïssé concludes the history of female influence under the regency. Although she outlived the close of that period for several years, she belongs to it by her education and by her errors: but though she was not so fortunate as to escape its immorality, she at least never participated in its heartless corruption. She was one of the few women in upper society whom no faults of conduct could wholly divest of their native truth and purity. Her power was limited; but within its sphere it was a severe, and—strange as it may seem—a moral power. Her earnestness and honesty of feeling were recognised and respected. It was only the extreme weakness and frivolousness of Madame de Parabère which prevented her from being reclaimed by her friend. Her efforts to inspire her with the desire of a purer life were well known. On one occasion, when Madame de Parabère had discarded her lover, those who wished to succeed him in her favour, fearing lest Mademoiselle Aïssé should take this opportunity to convert her friend, agreed to prevent

them from meeting until the lady should have made a new choice.

The indulgence which Aïssé displayed towards Madame de Parabère did not extend to Madame de Tencin. Between these two women—one frail and erring, but still so candid and noble-minded; the other heartless, corrupt, and a profound dissembler—there always existed a strong feeling of repulsion. Mademoiselle Aïssé pitied Madame de Parabère, whilst she reproved her vices: the weakness of her character and intellect partly excused her; but there was something in the mixture of great talents and total want of principle, characteristic of Madame de Tencin, which was, and justly so, more repugnant to her moral sense than mere profligacy. Though she could not avoid mingling with those whose vices she condemned, habit never mitigated Mademoiselle Aïssé's indignation against the corruption of the age: she expressed it all in her correspondence, with singular force and energy. On one occasion, when her pen refused to trace some new deed of infamy, she prophetically exclaimed: "Everything that happens in this monarchy announces its coming destruction."

Had her own example always sanctioned her principles, Mademoiselle Aïssé might have possessed a power far more extensive and beneficial than that which she owned: and yet, so corrupt was the age, her scruples and sincere penitence were neither much admired nor understood. The deep sorrow she felt for the errors of her youth only excited a feeling very akin to ridicule in the mind of Voltaire, when he read her correspondence many years after her death. That sorrow has purified and exalted her memory in the judgment of posterity.

The part which the Circassian Aïssé acted in the history of her times is not perhaps very striking or important. But those whose task it is to dwell on the state of French society during the regency, will ever find it difficult to forbear introducing a figure so touching and so pure, amidst the shameless licence which must form the subject of their whole picture.

PERIOD THE SECOND.

REIGN OF LOUIS XV.



Madame de Tencin.

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CHAPTER I.

RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THE REGENCY—THE FIRST BUREAUX D'ESPRIT—MADAME DE LA POPELINIÈRE—MADAME DE TENCIN.

THE regency can only be viewed as one of those transitory periods which seemed destined to mark in history the passage, otherwise too sudden and violent, from one epoch to another.

If we consider the reign of Louis XIV. and that of his successor,—a stern but still majestic tyranny, on the one hand, and a weak, profligate despotism on the other,—it is evident that the arbitrary power, once so strong and so respected, could not have fallen immediately, and without preparation, into the contempt and abhorrence which foretold its approaching ruin. Even as the human mind seldom passes at once from implicit belief to total scepticism, so that aggregate of human minds called a nation requires an intervening period before it wholly renounces the gods whom its fathers have worshipped. The sway of the regent acted as the necessary transition between a respected though hollow power, and one which, whilst it proved more hollow still, was not entitled even to the shadow of respect.

The secret corruption which undermined society during the long reign of Louis XIV. broke forth openly at the death of the aged monarch. The nation, on suddenly finding itself free, after years of gloomy restraint, plunged headlong into the most sensual excesses. None paused to examine what they should reject or admit: licence was the step which led from insincere devotion to professed scepticism. During the regent's sway, all faith in religious and political institutions

seemed to perish; materialism in its grossest form became the prevailing feeling of the nation: a feeling which the succeeding philosophers partly adopted and partly purified, before openly making it the creed of France. It is this difference between the mere indistinct feeling and the fully-defined creed which draws so wide a distinction between the regency and the reign of Louis XV. The corruption which was recklessly practised at one period as a defiance against the memory of Louis XIV., was systematically adopted and justified during the following reign; and, by destroying the remaining vestiges of the Middle Ages, it tended to aid the cause of scepticism. It was thus that France passed from that austere though decaying faith which characterised the seventeenth century, to the corroding and licentious incredulity of the eighteenth.

If we take this retrospective view of the regency, it is because that period was succeeded by a few years of repose and comparative decency, which might have led an unreflecting mind to conjecture that these previous saturnalia of a falling power could pass and leave no trace behind. The youth of the king, the purity of his early life, and the cautious moderation of the prime minister, Cardinal Fleury, caused a temporary reaction calculated to favour this belief. It was, however, precisely during this period that philosophy acquired the power which was to prove so formidable. As yet, it was scarcely feared or understood: it only embodied the opinions of a few individuals; it had not become the creed of the nation.

The free development of philosophy was greatly favoured by the personal characters of Fleury and the young king; for both, though through different motives, forbore to interfere with the professors of the new doctrines. The ambitious vanity of Louis XIV., as well as his natural tastes, had led him, in the spirit of his contemporaries, to identify himself with almost every remarkable movement which took place. It was thus that he controlled literature by becoming its patron, and completely ruled French society. The indolent and apathetic Louis XV., on the contrary, gave up the political power to his ministers and mistresses, and abandoned to women and

literary men that social influence which an unerring instinct had induced his predecessor to secure. The name of Louis XIV. is connected with every event of his reign; that of his descendant might almost be omitted in the history of the eighteenth century. In this indifference of Louis XV. to the personal exercise of power originated a wide separation between the court and French society, unknown until his reign.

Hitherto the monarch had been the great arbiter of public opinion. He might be influenced, but the influence was at least exercised in his name. The court ruled everything, from state matters to the success of a new play. What the court praised was inevitably admired in Paris. Such at least had been the case during the long reign of Louis XIV. The little heed Louis XV. took of anything not concerning his pleasures, and the timid scruples of Fleury—both so much opposed to the ardent and progressive spirit of the age—first created a feeling of independence in Parisian society. This feeling soon became one of antagonism, at first scarcely concealed, and openly declared in the end. The court long affected to contemn the new power which had thus sprung up into existence; and vainly attempted to supersede it when it had, in time, become the organ of the age. The attempt was, from its nature, doomed to fail; and, after a brief struggle, Versailles bowed before the decrees of a world from which it had, until then, held aloof with contempt.

It need scarcely be mentioned that this new power was under the sole and immediate control of women. Whilst men of talent were neglected by the court, the clever ladies of Parisian society received them in their saloons. It was the women who complied with the demands of the age, which neither Fleury nor Louis XV. understood. The cardinal feared and disliked light literature, which he considered of a dangerous tendency; the king was wholly indifferent to it. A few women seized on that important power: they gave evening and dinner parties, and soon drew together the great men of the day. When it was found that they could raise men to reputation and to social power more securely than

ministers or favourites, their court superseded that of royalty. Thus it was that women were among the first who paved the way to those great changes in the religious and political state of the nation which occurred towards the close of the century.

During the earlier portion of Louis XV.'s reign, the philosophic power developed itself slowly, but not wholly unperceived. Already every literary production, history, play, tragedy, or romance, introduced those significant declamations against fanaticism and the priesthood, which, at a later period, were directed against religion itself. It was natural and inevitable, under an absolute government, that books should be rendered an organ of public opinion. Though the laws granted no institutions, literature was invested with all the force of one by the general and tacit consent of society. Had Fleury been a man of daring and commanding mind, he might easily have conciliated the philosophic party, and softened, if not subdued, the vehemence of their attacks on religion. But, though aware of their dangerous influence, the cardinal would neither conciliate them by protection nor irritate them by persecution. He never ventured beyond a timid repression, which they scarcely heeded.

This medium course was that which the prudent and cautious priest adopted in governing France. By merely allowing the country to recover in peace and quietness from the disasters inflicted by the ambition of Louis XIV., he effected much good. But even whilst he made peace and economy the basis of his government, Cardinal Fleury was well aware of numberless evils, in which, though he felt his utter powerlessness to remove them, he partly foresaw the approaching ruin of the state. The accumulated miseries of centuries lay beyond his reach; they required no less than the vigorous and personal interference of the nation: in other words, a revolution. This Fleury felt; and, with the gloom natural to old age, he considered this dissolution of the existing order of things as the end of the world: the increasing spirit of irreligion confirmed him in this belief. With a strange infatuation, the cardinal, however, persisted in his conduct towards that power of which

he perceived the gradual and fatal advances. Without venturing on serious opposition, he rigidly refused to allow the philosophers any other influence than that social one of which they were already possessed; either undervaluing this influence, or feeling his own inability to repress it. When the young and libertine Abbé de Bernis—la bouquetière du Parnasse, as his frivolous talent for versifying had made him be called—asked the old cardinal for a living, Fleury peremptorily refused. "You shall never," he observed, "obtain a living whilst I live." "I shall wait, then," was the prompt and audacious reply. And a few years later Cardinal Bernis governed France with Madame de Pompadour.

It has been observed, and with great truth, that the philosophers were treated too much like the young abbé. As long as the cardinal lived, they could do little outwardly; but, like the abbé, the whole body bided their time, inwardly exclaiming, "We shall wait;" and like him, too, when the old cardinal was in his grave, they governed France—as they had longed to govern her—by the power of ideas.

Thus, favoured by the indifference of the monarch and the timidity of his ministers, philosophic literature developed itself freely. We have used the term "philosophic literature," because literature, which in France had been learned and religious during the sixteenth century, poetical and brilliant in the seventeenth, became almost exclusively philosophic in the eighteenth century. Never, indeed, was there an age less fitted for faith or poetry: the deep and withering corruption of the regency seemed to have destroyed the very root of these faculties in man. To know and study himself—not, however, in an elevated point of view—became his greatest intellectual want. Abstract reasoning superseded feeling and imagination: a cold analytic tendency is remarkable in the earliest productions of this period. But however heartless the action of intellect may have then been, it was full of life and energy. After the grossness and licence of the regency, a reaction took place in the feelings of the nation, and there arose a universal wish for intellectual excitement.

Two women, Madame de la Popelinière and Madame de Tencin, represented the various aspects of this new feature in the tastes of the nation: Madame du Maine and the courtly beaux-esprits of Sceaux were already left far behind. Men of the world, who to their general licentiousness united a voluptuous taste for the fine arts, mingled with singers, musicians, painters, and poets, in the drawing-room of the graceful Madame de la Popelinière. This lady, herself the daughter of an actress, and the wife of one of the wealthiest farmers-general of the day, was admirably adapted to connect the degenerate scions of a reckless nobility with the men who administered to their pleasures. She helped to found the loose and degraded school of art which had already superseded the stately magnificence introduced under Louis XIV., and which was afterwards brought to its highest point by the patronage of Madame de Pompadour. M. de la Popelinière was one of those opulent financiers whose intercourse and alliances with the nobility had enabled them to acquire all the external polish of the upper ranks of society. The growing importance of this class was a revolution in the manners of the nation, which foreboded one in the form of their government. M. de la Popelinière's ostentatious patronage of artists had won for him the title of the French Mecænas. Rameau, the composer; Vaucanson, the mechanician; Vanloo, the painter; his lovely wife, who introduced Italian singing into France; Lany, the dancer, with poets like the rosy Abbé de Bernis or the heavy Bernard, (so inappropriately named "le gentil,") represented art and poetry at the house of the rich financier.

Madame de la Popelinière was far superior to her husband. Her mother, Mademoiselle Daucour, had educated her for the stage, on which she would probably have figured with much applause, if M. de la Popelinière, fascinated by her beauty and elegant wit, had not made her his mistress. Mademoiselle Daucour represented herself to Madame de Tencin as having been seduced by her lover; and so interested her protectress in her behalf, that she mentioned her case to the prime minister. The act of openly keeping a mistress was a luxury

as yet scarcely authorised among the bourgeoisie : vice was still considered the privilege of the noble and the great. Fleury exacted that M. de la Popelinière should marry Mademoiselle Daucour; threatening, in case of refusal, to withdraw the lease which he held from the king as farmer-general. M. de la Popelinière complied; but he never forgave his mistress the means she had taken to secure the rank of his wife.

Madame de la Popelinière soon became one of the most admired women of the Parisian world. She adapted herself to her new position with singular ease and tact, and did the honours of her husband's house with the utmost grace and affability. Her wit and taste became celebrated; the latter quality was especially displayed in the judgments she passed on all the works of art or literature submitted to her : she was soon thought infallible in such matters. An appeal against any of her decisions was, until J. B. Rousseau came, a thing almost unheard of. Marmontel, an excellent judge on these subjects, and by no means prejudiced in her favour, speaks of her talents as a critic with the highest praise. "Madame de la Popelinière," he observes, in his Memoirs, "paid me some attention. She wished me to read 'Aristomène' to her; and of all the critics I had consulted she was, in my opinion, the best. After hearing my tragedy, she analyzed it with singular clearness and precision; retraced the course of the action, scene by scene; remarked the passages which she had found beautiful, as well as those she thought feeble; whilst all the corrections she proposed struck me as so many rays of light. A perception so lively, so rapid, and yet so just, astonished the whole company; and, though at this reading I received abundant applause, I must say that her success eclipsed mine."

The successes of Madame de la Popelinière were short lived. She engaged, through mere vanity, in an intrigue with Richelieu, which her husband discovered. He made her a handsome allowance, but would no longer allow her to reside under his roof. Madame de la Popelinière was thus excluded for ever from that elegant society over which she had ruled

with so much grace: for the Parisian world adopted the Spartan maxim of punishing, not those who sinned, but those who did not sin cleverly enough. A painful illness cut her off in the flower of her age: grief and ennui aggravated her sufferings: the Duke of Richelieu, however, paid her great attention until her death, and was lauded to the skies for this heroic constancy.

Whilst Madame de la Popelinière represented the artistic tendencies of society, the more strictly intellectual portion—the men of science and daring thought—gathered around Madame de Tencin; that *queen of beaux-esprits*, as she was then called. After acting the part of a profligate intrigante under the regency, Madame de Tencin, under the ministry of Fleury, seemingly gave up her intrigues, and was satisfied with keeping one of the earliest and most celebrated bureaux d'esprits of the eighteenth century. Fleury, who feared and disliked her, did not venture to oppose this branch of her power: he even submitted to her influence more than he imagined; for, whilst he often yielded to the advice of his old friend, Madame de Carignan, this lady was wholly under the guidance of Madame de Tencin. Not satisfied with this influence, the ex-nun wished to govern through her brother. Her intrigues procured him the highest dignities of the Church, but failed in raising him to the rank of minister. This want of success in her most ardent wish made her give more time and attention than she might otherwise have granted to her literary society. We have already alluded to it in the preceding pages, but its most brilliant epoch was certainly during the ministry of Fleury. This little coterie, more truly select and intellectual than any of those by which it was succeeded, has been described with much liveliness by Marmontel: "I there saw assembled, Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Mairan, Marivaux, the young Helvetius, Astruc, and others, all literary or scientific men; and in the midst of them a woman of singular talents and profound judgment, but who, with her plain and simple exterior, had more the look of the housekeeper than of the mistress. This was Madame de Tencin. I

soon perceived that each guest came there ready to act his part, and that the wish of shining often prevented conversation from following an easy and natural course. Every one seemed anxious to seize, as quickly as possible, and as it flew by, the opportune moment of uttering his bon-mot and his anecdote, —of ushering his maxim or his trail of light and brilliant wit; and this necessary à propos was often rather farfetched. In Marivaux the impatient wish of displaying his sagacity and finesse was visibly manifested. Montesquieu waited with more calmness until the ball should come to him, but he waited for it nevertheless; Mairan watched for the favourable opportunity; Astruc disdained to wait; Fontenelle alone let it come to him without seeking for it, and he made so discreet a use of the attention with which he was heard, that his ingenious remarks and charming stories never occupied more than a moment; Helvetius, attentive and discreet, listened and collected for the future."

Such was, no doubt, the external aspect of Madame de Tencin's society; but there was more in it than met the eye of so superficial an observer as Marmontel. Under the superintendence of a cold, worldly woman, the germ of the future encyclopædists was being slowly but surely developed. A mind so keen, so clear-sighted, so deeply versed in the details of political machinery, as was that of Madame de Tencin, could not but be annoyed and disgusted at the disorder of everything in the state. Disappointed ambition converted this feeling into one of secret but dangerous opposition. She found no difficulty in imparting her own sentiments of discontent to her friends. The actual circumstances of the country favoured the growth of such feelings; nor was Madame de Tencin unfitted to receive the first outpourings of the covert indignation which the condition of France was then beginning to inspire. As she advanced in age her conduct naturally became more correct than it had been hitherto; she could not command esteem, but her tact and address enabled her to secure the outward respect of those who approached her: she asked no more. Those who esteemed her least

could not be indifferent to her, and the attractions of her mind and conversation procured her more admirers than she had formerly obtained by the charms of her person: she even numbered amongst her friends Pope Benedict XIV., who, as Cardinal Lambertini, had frequented the literary circle at her house. When he was raised to the pontifical chair he sent her his portrait in token of remembrance, and carried on a close correspondence with her. The immorality of Madame de Tencin was, moreover, no disqualification for becoming the advocate of enlightened freedom. It was a characteristic feature of the eighteenth century, that all those who prepared the great but short-lived triumph of liberty with which it closed, participated, from Madame de Tencin down to Mirabeau, in the immorality of the age. Freedom sprang not, as in Rome or in early Greece, from a primitive purity of morals, but from the very corruption of preceding tyranny. It was an intellectual movement, and all joined in it; not so much for the reason that the existing state of things was corrupt or impure, as because all felt that it was worn out, and doomed to perish. This was especially the case with the early philosophers; the school of Rousseau adopted a more exalted and sentimental tone: all had the same end in view—destruction.

Madame de Tencin was one of the first women who laid the basis of this formidable power. The nature of her influence over her contemporaries may be traced in two important works, which, if they do not owe their existence to her, were at least inspired by the tone prevailing in her circle. We allude to Montesquieu's "Esprit des Lois," to the success of which Madame de Tencin greatly contributed, and to Helvetius's "De l'Esprit;" not published, indeed, until after her death, but imbued with the doctrines which both she and her friends professed. Thus the first attack on absolute monarchy in favour of constitutional freedom, and the first display of that gross materialism which characterised the eighteenth century, both originated in the drawing-room of Madame de Tencin.

In the present altered state of society, it may appear

strange to see a clever and unprincipled woman acting so important a part. But we have already shewn that the absence of political rights rendered this interference of women unavoidable. Madame de Tencin was well aware of the power of her sex. Her advice to Marmontel on his conduct in the world, was, above all things, to secure the friendship of women. It is, indeed, certain that without their aid nothing could have been done in France for freedom. A strong proof of this is afforded by the fate of a political and literary club—known as the club de l'Entresol—which was founded in Paris in the year 1724. Bolingbroke, then an exile in France, induced a few of his friends, at the head of whom was the Abbé Alary, to form a society, and meet occasionally in order to discuss the political questions of the day. They met in the entresol of President Hénault's hotel, whence they derived their name. As they were personally acquainted with one another, they had no fear of being betrayed. All the abuses in the state, and every interesting political question of the moment, were noticed by them, and duly commented upon. The philanthropic but visionary Abbé de Saint-Pierre here read his projects for perpetual peace, and discussed how dukes and peers might be rendered useful to the state: a difficult question to solve. Many high and eminent men joined the meetings of this society. The nobles were far from being averse to the constitutional system of England, which, whilst it secured the liberty of the poorer classes, granted preponderating power and influence to the aristocracy, by whom it had been established.

Fleury saw a germ of opposition in the existence of this political club, and, after tolerating it for several years, he caused it to be quietly suppressed. It was useless for the members to resist: no law secured the right of meeting in order to criticise the acts of government; and, as they were neither thrown into the Bastile, nor otherwise persecuted, they had, according to the existing state of things, little reason to complain. They had failed, moreover, in enlisting the women in their cause: many of Bolingbroke's disciples affected to

despise what they called drawing-room reputations; and, seduced by the brilliant and versatile talents of the English nobleman, aimed at becoming, like him, statesmen and orators. They forgot that, if they were ready with their parts, the stage was still wanting.

The women took the greatest vengeance in their power on this encroachment on their privileges: they never spoke of the club de l'Entresol whilst it existed, and they raised no voice in its favour when it was dissolved. The result of this was that the suppression was scarcely heeded, and was immediately forgotten. Would Fleury, would any other minister, have dared to control the soirées of Madame de la Popelinière or of Madame de Tencin? far more destructive, however, and dangerous to the state than the pacific and social theories of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre; for if they did not outstrip him in their views, they avoided clothing them in the ridiculous form which caused the good abbé to be both contemned and tolerated. Everything that sprang from these assemblies was clear and tangible; there was an end in view, and the strides made towards that end were both straightforward and swift. The members of the club de l'Entresol were dispersed as soon as they ventured to express their opinions beyond their own narrow circle. Under the presidency of a fashionable woman they might have spoken fearlessly. It was this that constituted the great social influence of woman. Every day this power acquired a greater impetus; for every one began to see that, in order to be celebrated and admired, it was not needful to be either presented at Versailles or patronised by a minister. A few words of elegant praise from Madame de la Popelinière, a quiet remark of Madame de Tencin's, were enough to insure this result in the higher classes. Around these fair planets moved innumerable stars which received their light from them, and diffused it in their turn to the inferior circles over which they presided. Thus the same spirit was spread throughout the whole of society.

And whilst matters were going on thus, whilst women and

literary men were wielding that formidable power called opinion—and which, let governments change as they will, still rules the world—what did the court, the ministers, or the king do, if not to win it over, at least to control it? The answer is the history of France at that period—they did nothing!

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CHAPTER II.

THE COURT — LOUIS XV. — HIS MISTRESSES — MADAME DE MAILLY — MADAME DE VINTIMILLE — MADAME DE CHATEAUROUX.

WHILST Madame de la Popelinière and Madame de Tencin represent and govern the élite of French society, types of the corruption of the nobility, of the folly and insolence of princely rank, and of the weakness of falling monarchy, may be found in the Duke of Richelieu, the Count of Charolais, and the young and indolent Louis XV.

The versatile Richelieu, formerly Duke of Frousac, is eminently fitted to stand forth as the grand seigneur of the eighteenth century: brave, handsome, profligate, and witty, the darling pet of the austere Madame de Maintenon, the favourite of all the handsome women of this time; from the royal princess down to the grisette, he distinguished himself through three generations, by gallantries, diplomatic intrigues, and occasional successes in war. Profligate even in his old age, he died on the eve of the great convulsions of French society: reckless of the past, indifferent to the future, and bequeathing the aristocratic corruption he had fomented to the fierce vengeance of the French Revolution.

The aristocracy were, under Fleury, what they had been under the regency of the Duke of Orleans,—reckless and corrupt. They still kept aloof from the literary circles, but began to receive and visit the financiers; whose daughters brought wealth and mésalliance into more than one ancient house. With the exception of a few nobles who frequented Madame de la Popelinière's circle, the great majority were indifferent to the arts which they vainly affected te patronise.

The Maréchal d'Estrées, who possessed one of the finest collections of antiques in France, never knew the value of the treasures he spent vast sums to accumulate. Having once heard that a bust of Alexander, said to be by Praxiteles, had been bought at a sale a few years before, by an unknown Parisian amateur, he commissioned one of his agents to discover and purchase it, if possible. After long researches, the bust was found in his own gallery, where it lay forgotten and covered with dust. Such was the enlightened patronage extended toward the arts by the French nobility.

This haughty indifference to elegant pursuits was not redeemed by the rigid virtues with which it has been sometimes accompanied. The nobles, who disdained to lower themselves to the level of poets and artists, yet turned their old ancestral mansions into gambling-houses. The young Horace Walpole thus alludes to the subject, in one of the letters written during his first continental tour:—"It is no dishonour to keep public gaming-houses: there are at least a hundred and fifty people of the first quality in Paris who live by it. You may go into their houses at all hours of the night, and find hazard, faro, &c. The men who keep the hazard table at the Duke of Gesvres' pay him twelve guineas each night for the privilege. Even the princesses of the blood are dirty enough to have shares in the banks kept at their houses. We have seen two or three of them; but they are not young, nor remarkable, but for wearing their red of a deeper dye than other women: though all use it extravagantly." The prejudices of the Middle Ages remained, but the deep sense of chivalrous honour belonging to those times had wholly vanished.

To all the vices of the nobility, the princes of the blood added a singular amount of folly, insolence, and cruelty. The Duke of Orleans, son of the regent, a learned and austere Jansenist, distinguished himself by extraordinary whims. It was his settled belief that the laws of nature had become suspended, and that neither births nor deaths any longer occurred. Until the birth of the Dauphin, this learned madman was the heir-

presumptive to the throne. The insanity of the degenerated Condés took a more dangerous form. The most harmless of them was subject to fits, during which he barked like a dog; the princes of Cont became notorious for their revolting and atrocious actions; the Count of Charolais *amused* himself with shooting down tilers from the roofs of the houses; for the consequences of which princely amusement he was three times pardoned by the king.

Mingled fear and hatred was the only feeling the people entertained for the nobles and the princes; but the faith in royalty still lived, strong and deep, in their hearts. Before the revolution of 1789, the attachment of the French to their sovereign was proverbial: nor was it unfounded. Ever since Louis VI., the monarchs of France had endeavoured to raise the condition of the commons, and to lower the pride of the nobility. The people naturally felt grateful to the king, who thus delivered them from the oppression of their local tyrants. He soon became in their eyes the source of all law and all justice; it was this that invested him with a sacred character. As long as the nobles had the greatest share of power, no doubt was thrown on the infallibility of royalty; but when the nobles were completely subdued—when the monarch and his people stood face to face—then the latter, all their illusions being dispelled, broke the idol they had worshipped so long. The absolute power of royalty thus led to its fall.

The affection of the French for their monarchs survived, however, the good they had derived from them. Oppressed and degraded as the people were in the early part of the eighteenth century, they still idolised their young sovereign. The lonely and unprotected state of the descendant of so many kings, the dangers to which he was thought to be exposed, his beauty, and tender years, all contributed to render him dear to the nation. It was fondly believed that, as soon as the king should have begun to govern for himself, every evil would be remedied. This hope was evidently exaggerated: no monarch could have accomplished a task so

mighty; but there is no doubt that Louis XV., had he been sufficiently earnest or energetic, might have effected much. He might have consolidated the royal authority, instead of leaving it weakened and decayed; he might have bettered the condition of the people, and not have driven them to desperation; by doing nothing, by allowing matters to take their course, he entailed numberless evils on France and on his own posterity.

It was the greatest misfortune of Louis XV. to have been badly educated. The opposite and pernicious influences of his preceptor Fleury and his governor Villeroi may be traced in every error of his life. Fleury, either actuated by personal ambition, or fearing the effects of the rashness natural to a young and inexperienced monarch, instead of teaching his pupil how to command for the good of the people, only taught him to obey. This mistaken policy, joined to the apathetic temper of the young king, rendered him, at a later period, the slave of his ministers and mistresses. The Duke of Villeroi, on the other hand, impressed his pupil with the most exaggerated ideas of royal authority. Whenever on festive days crowds gathered in the garden of Versailles, Villeroi led the king to the balcony, and exclaimed, "Look at them, sire! all this people belongs to you!"—a fatal lesson, which was not lost on the future owner of the Parc aux Cerfs. It was by such teaching that Louis XV. grew up into that most despicable of kingly characters—a weak tyrant. Convinced of the sacred nature of his power, he recklessly yielded it up to every unprincipled courtesan who pleased his fancy; he thus became doubly guilty, since, whilst he betrayed the people he was bound to govern and protect, he also degraded that principle of the divine right of kings, in the belief of which he had been brought up.

It was long, however, ere the errors of Louis XV. could make him forfeit the love of the people. Whenever he appeared in public, the grace and youthful majesty of his person, his mild and handsome Bourbon countenance, and those deep-blue eyes, of a hue held to be unrivalled, ex-

cited universal admiration and sympathy. But even then, those whose glance went deeper than mere externals, saw serious cause for apprehension in the temper of the young king; and many could trace the future selfish voluptuary in the cold irony which already marred the sweetness of his smile.

The natural temper of Louis XV. was, nevertheless, amiable: the selfishness he displayed was more the result of his position than that of his nature. He was incapable, however, of a deep feeling of attachment, and only loved through habit, which was all-powerful over him. He never made but a petty use of his power: even in his youth he was not averse to the satisfaction of mortifying a presumptuous courtier, or of keeping him in suspense concerning his real intentions. Though too indolent and apathetic to be vindictive, a feeling which implies energy, he never forgave or forgot an injury. His mind was superior to his character: no courtier surpassed him in keen, caustic wit or happy repartee; his judgment was clear, sound, and penetrating; the opinions he emitted on state affairs often struck his ministers as so many rays of light. But it was seldom that Louis XV. cared to have an opinion on any matter unconnected with his pleasures; more seldom still that he persisted in following his own judgment: he went through the business of the state with evident indifference and ennui. An education that fostered such feelings led directly to sensuality; and though nothing could be further from Fleury's intention than this sad result, it was the only one his ill-directed teaching could reap. Before becoming renowned for his licentiousness, Louis XV. was already remarkable for *gourmandise;* and the presence of a new cook in the royal kitchen was an event of sufficient importance to be mentioned in the king's letters to his friends. Too weak for ardent religious feelings, he gave his whole attention to superstitious observances and a perfect knowledge of the rubric; congratulating himself whenever he could find a courtly bishop in fault.

The young king found no resources against ennui in litera-

ture. Fleury disliked and distrusted the productions of his own times, and inspired his pupil with the same feeling. Louis XV. always shewed a decided aversion to the bel esprit which characterised the period: he shunned the society of the brilliant Madame du Maine, whilst he courted that of her amiable and unassuming sister-in-law, Madame de Toulouse. Thus leading a life of indolence and sensuality, Louis XV. could not always find in hunting, or in a puerile devotion, a sufficient source of pleasure; he accordingly indulged in the most effeminate amusements. At one time the whole court was thrown into great commotion by a sudden fancy which the king took for worsted work. A courier was instantly despatched to Paris for wool, needles, and canvas; he only took two hours and a half to go and come back, and the same day all the courtiers in Versailles were seen, with the Duke of Gesvres at their head, embroidering, like the sovereign. But even *tapisserie* was ineffectual to allay those periodical attacks of despondency to which Louis was subject from his youth, and during which his only pleasure was to entertain those around him with long and dismal accounts of grave-yards, sudden deaths, and all the melancholy pageantry of stately funeral processions.

The great care which Fleury had taken to preserve him from the contamination of his court, long rendered the young king indifferent to any woman but his wife, the good but unattractive Marie Lecsinska. When the nobles pointedly drew his attention to the beauty of a court lady, Louis coldly asked if they thought her handsomer than the queen? Had Marie Lecsinska been a woman of tact and talent, she would have found it an easy task to govern her husband; but, instead of conciliating him, she unfortunately alienated his affection by her injudicious caprices. Wearied of his wife's society, Louis XV. began to indulge in those private suppers, in the company of a few favourite courtiers, which afterwards became so celebrated. It was at one of those suppers that the king first noticed Madame de Mailly, one of the plainest women of his court, but who pleased him by her mirth and good temper.

He made her his mistress, in a fit of pique against the queen. But, as he then feared scandal as much as he afterwards braved it, this intrigue was carried on with great secrecy.

Madame de Mailly was the eldest of five sisters, all fascinating in various respects, and who were destined to act a conspicuous part in the life of Louis XV.—four by their profligacy, and one by her virtue. During her connexion with the king, Madame de Mailly evinced a rare and remarkable disinterestedness. She was sincerely attached to Louis XV., and refused to meddle in political intrigues; for which the simplicity of her character rendered her wholly unfit. Those who had calculated on her easy temper as a means of rising into power—and Madame de Tencin was amongst them—were grievously disappointed in their ambitious schemes.

At the time of Madame de Mailly's favour at court, Mademoiselle de Nesle, one of her unmarried sisters, was residing in the abbey of Port-Royal. Ugly, but unprincipled and full of talent and energy, she formed the bold project of superseding her sister in the king's affections; and, by ruling over the facile Louis XV., of governing France, and ultimately all Europe. She immediately wrote to Madame de Mailly, expressing so ardent a desire of seeing the court, that her sister invited her to come and spend some time with her at Versailles. Notwithstanding her coarse and ungraceful person, and her total want of beauty, Mademoiselle de Nesle found no difficulty in fascinating Louis XV.: her brilliant and audacious wit, singular versatility of talent, and that inexhaustible power of yielding amusement—so invaluable to an indolent monarch—blinded him to the imperfections of her person. The unhappy Madame de Mailly saw herself wholly neglected for a rival,—and that rival was her sister. The scandal was great. Fleury vainly opposed the king's new mistress: her power already balanced his; and she had, moreover, the art of never allowing its weight to be felt by her royal lover. She held, however, like Lauzun, the maxim, that the timid Bourbons required to be sternly ruled. Mademoiselle de Nesle had not long been at court when she married

M. de Vintimelle, who basely agreed to this nominal and degrading alliance. Her power was already acquiring formidable proportions, and she seemed on the eve of realising her ambitious plans, when death cut her off in the prime of life. The calumnies of the courtiers attributed her end to poison, administered through the agency of Fleury; but, much as he disliked the royal mistress, the pacific cardinal was incapable of this criminal action.

The king, much affected by the death of his mistress, was seized with a sudden fit of remorse and devotion. His only comfort was in the society of the kind-hearted Madame de Mailly, with whom he deplored the loss of the deceased. His grief was, however, of brief duration: Madame de la Tournelle, another sister of Madame de Mailly's, and far more handsome than either her or Madame de Vintimelle, whom she equalled in ambition, undertook to efface the memory of her sister from the heart of the king. She fully succeeded, and was soon acknowledged as the royal mistress. Henceforth, she became the centre of all the intrigues for power and influence carried on at court. When she went with the king to Choisy, and was thus declared the favoured sultana, a numerous suite of nobles and court ladies followed in her train. The Duke and Duchess of Luynes alone refused this disgraceful honour; for which act of independence and dignity they were never forgiven by the king. One of Madame de la Tournelle's first steps was to exact that Madame de Mailly should leave the court. Her unhappy sister, who still idolised the king, vainly begged of him not to banish her from his presence: he insisted that the request of Madame de la Tournelle should be complied with; the weeping and unpitied Madame de Mailly accordingly left Versailles for ever. She retired to Paris, and, like another Mademoiselle de la Vallière, devoted herself to the service of God. Without entering a convent, she led a life of such sincere penance and mortification, that even the most rigidly virtuous were compelled to admire her. The once-beloved mistress of a king—the sharer of those voluptuous banquets where he forgot his most sacred duties—now

deprived herself of the common necessaries of life in order to relieve the poor. The abodes of want and misery henceforth became her home. She accepted every privation as a feeble atonement for her sins; and when insults followed her, even in the house of prayer, she acknowledged them to be deserved, with touching and submissive humility. A man of the people once addressed her, in the church of Saint-Roch, with a coarse epithet. "Since you know me so well," said she, calmly turning round towards him, "pray for me!"

Madame de la Tournelle, who soon became Duchess of Chateauroux, displayed a character of much ambition and energy. Her sense of virtue was still sufficiently strong for her to feel humbled by the splendid degradation she had sought and won; but, though she had not sufficient principle to recede from the path she had taken, she resolved, as an atonement, to rouse the monarch from his disgraceful lethargy. The hopes which the nation had founded on their young king were already yielding to the conviction that his indolence would never allow him to fulfil the duties of his high station. This was fully evident to those persons who moved in the higher circles. Madame de Tencin was amongst those who rightly judged that the monarch's apathy might ultimately prove fatal to France. "What happens in his kingdom," she observes of Louis XV., in her confidential letters to Richelieu, "seems to be no business of his. . . . It is even said that he avoids taking any cognisance of what occurs, averring that it is better to know nothing than to learn unpleasant tidings. This is a fine sang froid; but though I am less concerned in this than he is, I shall never equal it." "The people," she remarks further on, with a depth and truth that might have warned Louis XV., the bien-aimé, of the fate of monarchy, "only love their kings through habit." The following pithy prophecy may be quoted as a proof of her political sagacity and foresight: "Unless God visibly interferes, it is physically impossible that the state should not fall to pieces." No miracle was made in favour of those who recklessly rushed on to ruin: half a century later the descendant of Louis XV. expiated

on the scaffold the culpable indolence of his predecessor. It was perhaps disappointed ambition that induced Madame de Tencin to express herself so bitterly. Both she and her brother, as well as the Duke of Richelieu, were amongst those who shewed most anxiety to turn to their own advantage the growing power of Madame de Chateauroux. On the death of Fleury, Madame de Tencin spared no insinuating flattery in order to induce Madame de Chateauroux to use her influence in favour of her brother. "A clever woman," she writes to Richelieu, "knows how to unite pleasure and general interest. Without wearying her lover, she can make him do what she likes. My brother could consult with her on this subject," (a cardinal of the Church and a royal mistress!) "and I have enough vanity to think I could become one of the principal springs of the great machinery it is her intention to set in motion." Had this plan succeeded—Madame de Chateauroux governing the king, and the cardinal being in his turn governed by his sister—Madame de Tencin would have become the great arbiter of every important question in France. Without meaning to assert that this unprincipled woman could or would have done much for the good of the country, it is evident that her double connexion with the government and the philosophic party might have tended to heal up the breach already existing between them both. But Madame de Chateauroux had not acquired her power in order to yield it up to another woman, and especially to so clever and intriguing a woman as Madame de Tencin. She was, moreover, surrounded by friends who gave her lessons in politics, in order that she might be fully qualified for her post; and by whose advice she confirmed the king in his dislike for the cardinal, and gave every important office to her own creatures. Madame de Chateauroux was, nevertheless, deeply convinced, like Madame de Tencin, of the necessity of some radical change in the government. Of the confusion by which it was characterised she spoke thus to a friend: "I could not have believed all that I now see; if no remedy is administered to this state of things, there will, sooner or later, be a great *bouleversement*."

Though the aim of Madame de Chateauroux was good, the means she took to effect it were not equally praiseworthy. Reckless of the real interests of the country, and desiring ardently to be the mistress of a great and admired monarch, she partly precipitated France into a fatal war, destined to humble Austria, and raise the unhappy Charles VII. to the throne of that empire. Like another Agnès Sorel, she urged the king to take the command of his army, and resolved to accompany him. This Louis forbade; but Madame de Chateauroux, taking the advice of Richelieu, her relative and most devoted courtier, privately followed Louis XV. in spite of his prohibition: she was accompanied by her sister, Madame de Lauragais, who shared with her the king's favour. Two princesses of the blood, the Duchess of Modena, formerly Mademoiselle de Valois, and the Princess of Conti, unblushingly followed in the train of the royal favourites.

The king had been received with enthusiasm by the army and the provinces; but when his mistress appeared everywhere with him, this feeling was changed to one of deep indignation at the unblushing effrontery of royal profligacy. The king's sudden and dangerous illness at Metz tended to increase this feeling. Two parties were now formed around the sick-bed of the monarch. The religious party, attached to the devout Marie Lecsinska, asserted that his most Christian Majesty and eldest son of the Church could not die without receiving the last sacraments; the condition on which they would be administered to him being the public dismissal of his paramour. The other party, that of Madame de Chateauroux, contended that the king was not beyond hope, and strained every nerve to keep him in this belief. Divided between his love for Madame de Chateauroux, and his terrors of eternal punishment, Louis XV. knew not how to act. Religious dread at length prevailed: for a servile fear, and not sincere penitence, was the only feeling his weak mind could know. The king ended by yielding to the advice of his confessor: he publicly begged the queen's pardon, expressed his sorrow for the evil example he had set to his subjects, and ordered

Madame de Chateauroux and her sister to be dismissed. This was done by her enemies with every mark of contempt. The two women, suddenly deserted by the courtiers, left the house where the king was lying ill, amidst the hootings of the populace; from whose fury they had to be protected during the whole of their journey to Paris.

The king had scarcely made this sacrifice to his fears of eternity when he recovered. The joy of the whole nation was so deep and real, that the monarch justly received the title of bien-amié. The churches, which during his illness had been filled to overflowing with worshippers petitioning Heaven in his behalf, now resounded with joyful *Te Deums* This feeling of gladness was greatly increased by a universal belief in the sincerity of the king's repentance. The poissardes of the Halle observed, in their own significant and impressive language, that if the king took back his mistress he might die without getting so much as a *Pater* or an *Ave* from them. This was the greatest threat of the women who exulted over the fate of Louis XVI., and followed Marie-Antoinette to the scaffold.

When the king was fully recovered, and had returned to Versailles, he fell into a fit of melancholy abstraction, of which the courtiers easily suspected the motive. The repentance of Louis XV. had never been heartfelt: it sprang from terror; and now that the death he had feared seemed once more distant, he felt both mortified at the humiliating part he had acted, and grieved at the loss of Madame de Chateauroux. Unable, or rather unwilling, to resist the pleadings of his love, he privately sought his injured and now neglected mistress. The result of this interview was soon known; for in a few days Maurepas, the mortal enemy of the duchess, called upon her, and, in the presence of a numerous assembly, humbly requested her, in the name of the king, to forgive the injurious manner in which she had been treated during his Majesty's illness, as well as to return to his court. Madame de Chateauroux, who was then slightly indisposed, answered, that as soon as she was recovered she should be happy to

obey the king's commands. This mortification had been inflicted, at her request, on Maurepas, as the first of those steps of retaliation, in which her haughty temper already meant to indulge on her return to court. But to that station, which she had purchased at the cost of peace and honour, she was never destined to return: her illness soon assumed an alarming character, and ere long the doctors declared her case hopeless. In a few days after the visit of Maurepas she died in the arms of the forgiving Madame de Mailly, and with promises of future penance on her lips; to verify which, life was not granted to her.

The death of his mistress overwhelmed the king with despair: it is said she was the only woman he ever really and sincerely loved. During her brief illness he shewed the greatest grief, and caused prayers to be offered up everywhere for her recovery. The death of Madame de Chateauroux was, like that of her sister, attributed to poison; but the only proof of this assertion was the fear her return to court excited in the minds of those who had imprudently declared themselves her enemies at Metz. Madame de Chateauroux was buried with great privacy in the church of Saint-Sulpice. An armed escort accompanied her coffin to the grave, lest the hatred of the populace should vent itself on her senseless remains.

This hatred was scarcely justified. Without seeking to palliate her errors, it may be asserted that Madame de Chateauroux was infinitely superior to the women by whom she was succeeded. She did not, like them, make an open traffic of her power: on being once offered a large sum in order to favour an individual at court, she refused with indignation and contempt. Her sense of the degradation of her position was never entirely obliterated. The dignified gentleness of the injured queen always affected her painfully: she confessed herself humbled in her presence. The pure and suffering Marie Lecsinska could have asked for no greater vengeance to fall on the haughty Madame de Chateauroux, than this feeling of humiliation and shame. It would also be

unjust to deny Madame de Chateauroux the merit of having sought to rouse Louis XV. from the state of apathetic indolence into which he had fallen. The means she took were injudicious, and led to new misfortunes; but her aim was noble. Experience might have taught her a better use of her power. Had that power lasted, as there is little doubt that it would, if her life had been prolonged, Louis XV. might have been another man.

The people, however, hated Madame de Chateauroux, without regard to the good or evil she might effect, because she seemed to them the personification of royal profligacy in its worst form. It was a fact beyond dispute that she had succeeded her two eldest sisters in the favour of the king, and it was generally believed that she had shared that favour with her sister, Madame de Lauragais. A corrupted court might look with indifference on such things: nor was royal profligacy treated with much severity in the philosophic circles; but in the mass of the nation, where the sense of morality and decency still survived, such facts, linked with the sovereign's name, only excited abhorrence and disgust. It did not tend to soften this feeling that, whilst the king forgot his duties and every honourable thought in guilty indulgences, the state of the country daily became worse. The unhappy and oppressed peasantry were the principal sufferers. The nobles themselves began to be alarmed at the consequences of so much misery. In the year 1739, fifty years before the French Revolution, whilst the country was in a state of peace, and the crops were of average abundance, men, according to the testimony of a contemporary minister, died by thousands, after vainly endeavouring to appease with grass the cravings of hunger. When the king was once holding his council, his relative the Duke of Orleans placed on the table before him a piece of bread made of heath, uttering the ominous words:—"Sire, this is the food of your subjects." The general misery spread even to the neighbourhood of Versailles, and still more unwelcome intimations of the truth than those which came from his counsellors met the king's ears. When he traversed the suburbs

of Paris, whilst going to his pleasure seats, the people no longer cried out, "Vive le Roi!" but "Famine" and "Bread!" Once, as he was hunting in the forest of Senart, he met a peasant on horseback, carrying a coffin before him. "For whom is that coffin?" asked the king, stopping. "For a man of ——." "Of what did he die?" "Of hunger," abruptly said the peasant, looking at him fixedly as he spoke. The king asked no more questions, but spurred his horse, and rode on.

Was there nothing in this reply of a subject to his sovereign? No warning of a lowering future? Nothing beyond the mere intimation that a man had died of hunger, within a few steps, perhaps, of the royal Versailles, that seat of corrupt luxury? If there was anything more, Louis XV. heeded it not: casting the burden of his sins on his innocent descendant, leaving him to expiate the accumulated evils of ages, he strove to forget what he had heard, and sought not to learn more.

It is not without deep reluctance that we have paused in our task, in order to place before our readers these pictures of royal profligacy; but they were necessary to the understanding of what has preceded, as well as to the full comprehension of what is to follow. Will it be wondered at that such a court should have little power? That, whilst royal courtesans governed the political kingdom, the social world sought, if not a purer, at least a freer and more intellectual atmosphere? It was this corrupt weakness of the court, and that increasing influence of society, which raised the formidable power of the most celebrated man of the age: it was these which gave him the keen weapon of ridicule he wielded so ruthlessly and so long; which made him protest by cynical writings against cynical abuses, and prepared the destruction of the brilliant society which almost worshipped the name of Voltaire.

Nor was this society unconscious of its own fate. Three women, with that instinctive foresight which arises from the keenness of their perceptions, had already predicted the issue of all this. The honest indignation of Mademoiselle Aïssé,

the sense of Madame de Tencin, and the love of Madame de Chateauroux, led them to the same conclusions: the forthcoming and inevitable ruin of the state. It is a great but common error to suppose that only a few statesmen like Turgot, and that almost on the eve of the Revolution, could foretell what was then visible to every one. The predictions of the three ladies already quoted, if less detailed and eloquent, are fully as significant, and have undoubtedly the merit of priority. It is, therefore, an error to think that the consciousness of a future crisis, then generally felt in society, was one "to which only the manly and far-seeing mind of Turgot could give complete utterance, by predicting, as we find him doing, that society was then hurrying on to some frightful convulsion."*

Such feelings naturally added to the power of the philosophic and literary circles. It is true these circles were far from being pure; their licentiousness was even the more repulsive that it was accompanied by so much intellect: but, at the same time, there is, and always will be, in intellect, an irresistible attraction; inducing men, not to excuse, but to suffer its errors, for the sake of the good by which they are redeemed. Intellect is the source of moral greatness and excellence. If it has been perverted, if the divine gift has been turned into evil, yet, even from that very perversion, future good may arise. Never was this principle more forcibly illustrated than in the times of which we are speaking. Against the sensual profligacy of falling monarchy, arose the formidable array of intellectual licence. The rulers of France had recklessly trampled on every moral right. The philosophers as ruthlessly destroyed every divine tie, which, by linking man to Heaven, so firmly knits him to his brother man.

With the rudeness of the Middle Ages vanished those stern and chivalrous virtues which have rendered them immortal. The philosophers acted as though they had resolved that not even the memory of those heroic times should remain as a

* Letters of Eminent Persons to David Hume. Introductory notice by J. H. Burton.

link between the degenerated descendants of Bayard and Dugueselin and the sons of the serfs: the pure and hallowed name of the maiden who freed her country from the stranger's yoke was held up to scorn in licentious strains. Everywhere the past was insulted and reviled; everywhere moral ruins, more fearful than the empty and violated tombs of the royal dead in the abbey of Saint-Denis during the Revolution, met the beholder's eye: for on the human mind there had fallen a blight, which will make the eighteenth century appear for ever as a wide and fearful gulf between the past and the future of France.

There is greatness in this power of intellect. True, it went too far; true, it added to the work of destruction; but, let it be remembered, the "mission" of the times was to destroy, not to erect or create. In the moral as well as in the physical world, life may spring even from corruption and decay; and if institutions perish, there is a power of truth in the heart of man which cannot die.



Madame du Chatelet.

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CHAPTER III.

VOLTAIRE AND MADAME DU CHATELET.

THE name of Voltaire fills the whole of the eighteenth century. It has seldom been given to one man, and that man an author, to exercise so great a power as that which he possessed. By identifying himself with all the passions, feelings, and prejudices of his contemporaries; by clothing them with that brilliant style in which he expressed his keen scepticism and easy Epicurean philosophy, he naturally became the great organ of the age: a mission which only his vast and versatile mind could fulfil.

It is impossible to speak of the eighteenth century without alluding to Voltaire. More is necessary in this case; since his fate closely connected him with one of the most remarkable women of those times, the well-known Madame du Chatelet. Voltaire has received, as the penalty of his high fame, too much unqualified praise and opprobrium. He was neither the perfect being his partisans idolised nor the monster his enemies reviled. The feeling of hatred against him has been too bitter and unrelenting. This feeling was excited by his opinions, and not by his actions. It is the doctrines he professed, and particularly the manner in which he professed them, that drew down so much animadversion on his name. In his life, Voltaire resembled other men: if he sometimes stooped to acts of petty spite and revenge unworthy of any man, many noble and generous actions nevertheless honour his memory. His errors were chiefly the result of the times on which he was cast: had he lived in a free country, and in a purer atmosphere than that which surrounded him, he would

neither have sinned so deeply, nor, to say the truth, would he have won so much fame and power.

But Voltaire came at a period when faith and morality were almost equally weak; when institutions were hastening to their inevitable decay; and he brought with him one of those sarcastic and sceptical dispositions which are of every time, though they can only fulfil their destructive task at an epoch of general weakness and degradation. The scepticism of Voltaire was displayed even in the Jesuit college where he was educated, and where one of the fathers foretold that he would prove the relentless foe of religion. No external influences removed those early signs of infidelity from the mind of the young Arouet—such was his real name. The profligate Abbé de Chateauneuf introduced him into the coterie of the old Ninon de l'Enclos, where the youth was confirmed in the free and Epicurean Deism he ever after professed. When the unknown Arouet had become M. de Voltaire the celebrated author, he found in his ambitious vanity a still greater inducement to follow the creed of the profligate and elegant society whose approbation he always courted with passionate eagerness.

That his scepticism was neither very bold nor original, the timidity of his earlier works clearly proves. Success, by revealing to him the extent of his power, first rendered him reckless and free: whilst the world for which he wrote admired him, and shared his feelings, Voltaire might well despise the paltry persecutions of a weak government. Had he appeared at another period, and attacked the prevalent opinions of society with the same perseverance he displayed in attacking things that were falling to ruin, he could justly have been termed a daring thinker. As it was, he had little claim to that title. The world was with him, and he knew it well: he knew that even those whose position bound them to persecute him openly, favoured him and his doctrine in the secret of their hearts; and the consciousness of this might well act as a compensation for whatever annoyances he had to endure.

From the first, Voltaire was guided by the desire of success.

He attacked what he believed to be error, and what he supported he considered to be the truth; but, in all that he upheld and opposed, he was not actuated by that singleness of purpose which elevates and purifies the mind. It was in this respect that Voltaire was eminently a sceptic. Faith was not in his nature: he never had that fervent and disinterested love of truth which, even in an erroneous cause, can make heroes and martyrs. He wrote for glory and distinction: a few court favours, without changing his creed, would have kept him silent. It is this want of earnestness, and not merely his scepticism, that ought to be condemned. What right had the man who valued his own opinions so little, to insult and revile the creed of others? What right had he, for the gratification of his vanity, to sow doubt and dismay in the minds of those who believed and found consolation in that belief?

There is much in this that explains the inconsistency of Voltaire's attacks on Revelation, the insincerity by which he disgraced and forwarded his cause, and the perfidious use which he made of ridicule, where, if truth was with him, reasoning ought to have sufficed. It was thus that he gratified his insatiable wish for fame: but it was dearly purchased at the cost of morality and an honourable independence. Voltaire was, however, by the nature of his mind, less guilty than this assertion may at first seem to imply. The truth is, that he had no fixed principles on any subject: he passed from one impression to another with an ease and rapidity almost unequalled. He was susceptible of any emotion; and though sense and sarcasm predominated in his mind, they never ruled it entirely. This infinite variety of impulses, which gave so great a charm to his style, rendered his character an extraordinary compound of the most opposite qualities and defects. Voltaire was, at the same time, generous and vindictive; independent, and yet a flatterer of the great; timid, and ever committing himself by new acts of imprudence: he even reconciled the seeming impossibility of warm but transient enthusiasm accompanied by a scoffing scepticism.

But Voltaire, in good or in evil, never went beyond mere

impulse. There is nothing great in his private or in his public life. Those who loved and admired him most, confessed that the endless vivacity of his mind wearied even whilst it dazzled. He passed from childish impatience to rapturous admiration, and from that again to deep sarcasm and irony; but whichever mood he took, it was marred by the want of that stability of principle, without which a character will ever fail in grace and harmony.

The writings of Voltaire bear the impress of his mind. They have all the vivacity and versatility of talent by which he was characterised. His prose is still unrivalled for clearness, purity, and elegance. As a poet—if, indeed, Voltaire may be called a poet—he ranks infinitely lower. All his works are disfigured by that intolerant and declamatory tone which contributed to their immense success, but which has been justly reproved by posterity. Great geniuses belong to every age: Voltaire was essentially the man of his own times. He had, indeed, no aspirations higher than those of the world in which he lived: that world was moral, was great enough for him. He was indifferent to serious political changes: his tastes and feelings were essentially aristocratic. At the same time his keen and practical good sense made him desire ardently the total freedom and independence of thought—the true basis of every other freedom—and the absence of which was doubly galling to a mind so impatient of restraint as was his. These remarks on Voltaire are by no means intended as a comprehensive view of his extraordinary and varied character; they were introduced because, however deficient they may be, the subject of this work rendered them indispensable.

We have already mentioned that the fate of Voltaire was closely linked with that of an eminent woman of those times, Madame du Chatelet, whose commanding mind understood and commented on Newton and Leibnitz, and entitled her to the high praise bestowed upon her by M. Ampère: "C'est un génie en géométrie!" Emilie Gabrielle de Breteuil had received a classical education, to which was united every ac-

complishment then in fashion; she had an excellent knowledge of Latin, Italian, and English. Her parents married her in her nineteenth year to the Marquis du Chatelet, an honest but commonplace man considerably her senior.

The young marchioness made her appearance in the world with much éclat. She was tall and graceful, and her blue eyes, dark hair, and expressive countenance entitled her, in youth, to the epithet of handsome. Her great talents long remained unsuspected. The world only saw in her a fine woman who sang and played exquisitely, and who seemed passionately fond of dress, hunting, and cavagnole. The Duke of Richelieu was then at the height of his fame for gallantry; few of the women to whom he paid any attention had sufficient principle to resist him. Madame du Chatelet, whose ideas of morality were those of her time, proved no exception to the general rule. The connexion between her and the duke was, however, extremely brief, and ended—very differently from most of his love intrigues—in a sincere and mutual friendship. Madame du Chatelet afterwards alluded to this transient liaison, in her letters to the Duke of Richelieu, with a mixture of regret and levity characteristic of the period. "Who would have thought," she wrote to her former lover, after a fit of illness, "that friendship could have caused me to be regretted by Madame de Richelieu, Voltaire, and you? I scarcely hoped for love to do this. We are happy only by these two feelings. I confess that in them lies all the happiness of my life." And further on, "I believe in my own worth since I begin to think that you have a sincere friendship for me. You know my heart, and how really engrossed it is now"—(by Voltaire)—"I feel proud of loving in you the friend of my lover. This feeling would add to the pleasure which I find in our friendship, if I had not embittered it. I cannot forgive myself for having entertained any other feeling for you, however slight it may have been." Of poor M. du Chatelet, or of regret at deceiving him, not one word.

Madame du Chatelet loved pleasure, but she was not fitted

for a merely worldly life. Wearied of dissipation, she entered with ardour on the study of the exact sciences. The brilliant but shallow Maupertuis was her teacher in geometry. He then enjoyed that high degree of female admiration which first fired the emulation of Helvetius. Whenever he walked in the Tuileries, Maupertuis was surrounded by a crowd of elegant and fashionable women. Geometry was then as much the rage as were the pantins at a later period. With some ladies it went so far as to induce them to study under the admired teacher. A kind of playful rivalry subsisted between Madame de Richelieu and Madame du Chatelet, for the lessons of their mutual friend, Maupertuis. With Madame du Chatelet, the matter was not, however, merely one of fashion; as was proved by the rapid progress which she made in a science for which her mind was strikingly adapted. She was studying the works of Newton when she met Voltaire, then recently returned from England, and, like her, an enthusiastic admirer of Newton's sublime discoveries. This similarity of tastes proved the first link between these two kindred spirits, and originated the long and celebrated connexion between the *divine Emilie* and the great sceptic of the eighteenth century.

Enamoured of her beauty, and still more of her passionate devotion to science, Voltaire addressed his fair mistress, under the appropriate name of Urania, in a very tender strain.

Madame du Chatelet was then in her twenty-eighth year. Voltaire was twelve years her senior. The loose maxims of the time justified their connexion in the opinion of the world and in their own. They might indeed have adopted a higher and nobler standard of morality, but that they did not do so must be less a matter of surprise than one of regret. As it grew more polished and sceptical, the aristocracy lost those virtues which can only exist in ages of a severe and enthusiastic faith. The chivalrous honour of man, and the chastity of woman, first yielded to the corrupting breath of the times. The philosophy which both the lovers professed, was, moreover, neither severe nor restrictive: as their conduct, indeed, plainly shewed. Madame du Chatelet was one of the first

ladies of the aristocracy who joined the philosophic party; but in this, as well as in her connexion with Voltaire, she still observed appearances, which her position in the world did not allow her to neglect, and accordingly attended mass with her lover, whilst, like him, she secretly wrote against Revelation. The same spirit of policy made Voltaire in his youth write verses in praise of the Virgin and the Saviour, whilst he attacked Christianity in private. Scepticism had not yet assumed the bold and open tone by which it was afterwards distinguished. Men still paid a vain show of outward respect to what they secretly hated, idly thinking that this dangerous irreverence would not pass beyond their own privileged ranks. Never was so much inconsistency of conduct displayed. The necessity of a religion for the inferior classes was contemptuously acknowledged by those who undermined it, apparently forgetting that the advantages of wealth and station they enjoyed rested on what they termed the ignorance and the fanaticism of the poor. If the privileges of rank were founded on folly and injustice, and if that religion which commands to bear injustice patiently was a dream, what security had they? It seems incredible that self-interest should not have checked all those philosophic and liberal tendencies, in the upper ranks at least. But it is a testimony to eternal truth, that even those who are to suffer most by its progress are involuntarily induced to forward its cause. Much of error as the growing philosophy contained, it nevertheless originated in a deep sense of the injustice and worthlessness of existing institutions. The only real matter of surprise is, that the philosophic aristocracy, who, whilst they acknowledged their privileges to be valueless in the eyes of reason, were no wise disposed to relinquish them, should have thought of confining their feelings to themselves. There can be no attempt more futile, none which shews so slight an acquaintance with the laws by which society is governed, than that which would endeavour to limit good or evil knowledge to one peculiar class. Sooner or later it must pass the barrier fixed by human vanity and pride.

The knowledge which the reader already possesses of the maxims of those times, will explain why the connexion of Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet was considered neither guilty nor unusual by the society in which they lived. No one therefore expressed any surprise when Voltaire took up his residence at Circy, a splendid château which M. du Chatelet possessed in the province of Lorraine. As it was necessary, however, to observe appearances, Voltaire protested that his attachment for Madame du Chatelet was purely platonic. "I confess," he observed, "that she is tyrannical: one must talk about metaphysics when the temptation is to talk of love. Ovid was formerly my master, it is now the turn of Locke." M. du Chatelet either did not suspect the truth, or if he did, he felt indifferent to it. He certainly raised no objection to the sojourn of Voltaire under his roof, and was rather flattered at being considered the host and patron of a man already enjoying European fame. As he spent the greatest portion of his time with his regiment, his presence proved little or no restraint to the lovers, who treated him with great respect.

The fifteen years which he spent at Cirey were perhaps the happiest Voltaire ever knew, notwithstanding the occasional differences which arose between him and Madame du Chatelet. To a man so eminently intellectual as he was, so much attached to every elegance and refinement of private life, no woman, unless one almost as highly gifted as himself, could have long proved attractive. Such, if the praise of a lover is to be trusted, was Madame du Chatelet:—

> "L'esprit sublime et la délicatesse,
> L'oubli charmant de sa propre beauté,
> L'amitié tendre et l'amour emporté,
> Sont les attraits de ma belle maîtresse."

The mind of Madame du Chatelet was greatly superior to her personal attractions, and even to her learning. Without excusing her relaxed morals, it must be admitted that, notwithstanding her errors, she possessed great qualities. As a friend, she was devoted and sincere. Her attachment for

Voltaire was full of truth and earnestness. She made it her constant task to soothe his susceptible vanity, hushing up by her personal influence the ridicule his imprudences so often excited, and concealing from him those contemptible libels of his enemies, by which he was so deeply distressed during his whole lifetime. Madame du Chatelet was herself nobly indifferent to such attacks. On being shewn one day a pamphlet in which she had not been spared, she calmly observed, "If the author has lost his time in writing such nonsense, I shall not lose mine in reading it." She learned the next day that the guilty individual had been imprisoned, and immediately wrote to obtain his release. She succeeded, but never let him know from whom he had received this favour.

Few women of her time were so free as Madame du Chatelet from that intriguing spirit and thirst for distinction by which almost all were then possessed. Science she loved for its own sake: for the pure and exquisite delights it yielded to her inquiring mind, and not for the paltry gratification of being considered a learned woman. She never sought to gather a literary coterie around her; never shewed the least wish to dictate in matters of which she was so excellent a judge. Many persons with whom she was in the habit of associating remained unconscious of her great talents, so little did she care to display them. Indifferent to praise, unless when it came from experienced judges, and then she probably felt it to be her due, she always disdained the easy advantage of shining amongst the ignorant. It was this love of science for its own sake, this haughty contempt of easy and showy success, that rendered Madame du Chatelet infinitely superior to the women with whom she mingled; and which almost maddened the envious Madame du Deffand, whilst it even discomposed the philosophy of the more amiable Madame de Staal.

At the same time it must be confessed that, even morality and religion set apart, the character of Madame du Chatelet was far from being a faultless one. With all her philosophy, she was as proud of her rank and birth as any court lady.

She treated her inferiors with a cold superciliousness, that shewed she fully felt their vast distance from herself. Her delicacy on many points was nowise remarkable. According to Madame de Graffingy, she was in the habit of opening all the letters that left Cirey or came to it, probably fearing lest anything concerning herself or Voltaire should be divulged. Her temper was violent and imperious. She ruled despotically over her lover, and left him very little personal freedom. Had he yielded entirely to her influence in literary matters, he would have written fewer tragedies, and devoted more of his time to science and history. It was indeed chiefly to comply with her wishes that he wrote "L'Essai sur les Mœurs et l'Esprit des Nations." The good qualities of Madame du Chatelet consisted more in a certain haughty independence of mind, in an untiring affection for those whom she loved, than in any very amiable traits. She was deficient in gentleness and in many of the most winning qualities of woman, but there was nevertheless in her so little affectation and intrigue, and so much of what was good and true, as to command respect, at an epoch when other women, possessing her position in life and her great mental acquirements, would not have rested satisfied until they had made France and all Europe echo with their praises.

It was by her simplicity of manner, as well as by the great solidity of her judgment, that Madame du Chatelet charmed Voltaire; too keen a judge of everything like affectation to tolerate it long. Even as it was, his satirical vein could not always refrain from an indirect sneer at the divine Emilie's enthusiastic pursuit of algebra, which was somewhat singularly mingled with more frivolous tastes. Madame du Chatelet appears to have been very much attached to *pompoms*, a favourite ornament in the dress of the times. Voltaire observes, in his correspondence:—

> "Cette belle âme est une étoffé
> Qu'elle brode en mille façons;
> Son esprit est très philosophe,
> Et son cœur aime les pompoms."

"Mais les pompoms et le monde sont de son âge, et son mérite est au dessus de son âge, de son sexe et du nôtre." According to the same authority, Voltaire himself was by no means indifferent to his toilet, and appeared in Cirey attired with all the elegance of a courtier of Versailles.

The life of this learned couple in their delightful retreat was one of study, varied by elegant pleasures. The apartments they occupied at Cirey were adorned with all the luxuries art and wealth could devise. Costly hangings, choice pictures, and rare books; everything, in short, which could attract the eye and please the mind was there. Voltaire caused, at great expense, a gallery to be fitted up with all the scientific instruments he and Madame du Chatelet needed. In this gallery also stood a statue of Cupid—no unapt illustration of their scientific loves—with the famous inscription beneath it:—

"Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître!
Il l'est, le fut, et le doit être."

Over the entrance to this gallery, Voltaire had likewise caused to be inscribed:—

"Asile des beaux-arts, solitude où mon cœur
Est toujours occupé dans une paix profonde,
C'est vous qui donnez le bonheur
Qui promettait en vain le monde!"

The door of the little belvedere where Madame du Chatelet studied was also poetically adorned:—

"Du repos une douce étude;
Peu de livres, point d'ennuyeux,
Un ami dans la solitude,
Voilà mon sort!—il est heureux."

Voltaire celebrated his love for Madame du Chatelet under almost every form. He wrote innumerable verses in her praise, and seemed never weary of mentioning her great talents and excellent qualities to his friends. The sincerity and disinterestedness of her affection, the admirable strength and clearness of her comprehensive mind, are themes to which he ever willingly returns in his correspondence. Madame du Chatelet

was no poet; she, however, composed a Latin verse for Voltaire, which was afterwards engraved on his tomb—

"Postgenitis hic carus erit, nunc carus amicis."

Madame du Chatelet only slept for three hours, in order to leave more time for study. Her temper was too ardent to allow her to follow Montesquieu's judicious advice: "You do not sleep in order to study philosophy; but you should, on the contrary, study philosophy in order to learn how to sleep soundly." The whole of the day was also devoted to her beloved studies. She seldom came down to dinner, but remained closeted in her apartment, commenting on Newton and Leibnitz, or continuing her written and animated controversy with M. de Mairan, the secretary of the Academy of Sciences. Besides her correspondence with Richelieu and Maupertuis, she wrote to several philosophers, and, among the rest, to Diderot, for whom she employed her influence when his imprudent writings had caused him to be incarcerated in Vincennes.

Voltaire, in the meanwhile, was composing "Mérope," or "Zaïre," by stealth: for Madame du Chatelet, herself wrapped up in algebra, always discouraged his poetical labours; or he was adding, perchance, a few pages to his "Siècle de Louis XIV." He occasionally diversified these occupations by peevishly fretting over some new libel of the Abbé Desfontaines, which had reached him, notwithstanding all Madame du Chatelet's vigilance; or by sending off to his Parisian friends those inimitable letters of his, which sparkle with all the wit, satire, and caprice of his versatile mind. Epigrams against his enemies; extravagant praises of the divine Emilie, of whose yoke he was sometimes heartily weary, or of Frederick of Prussia; querulous complaints of the persecutions which he, favoured among all who ever wrote, is compelled to endure; bursts of philosophic intolerance, succeeded by the effusions of a generous spirit, and the most amusing assurances, daily repeated for the last fifty years of his life, "that he is positively dying:" such are a few of the many characteristics of Voltaire's long and varied correspondence.

He did not meet Madame du Chatelet until the hour of supper. She then came down, and the rest of the evening was spent in conversation. Voltaire submitted his labours of the day to her judgment; Madame du Chatelet spoke of her scientific pursuits, giving a charm to those abstruse matters by the clearness and elegance of her language. Though she devoted almost the whole of her time to science, her taste in general literature was, notwithstanding, pure and correct. She possessed that exquisite conversational style, if we may so speak, which characterised the clever women of the age; and it was whilst living in daily intercourse with her that Voltaire produced his most perfect works. Cirey was often visited by literary and scientific individuals, who came to admire the charming retirement of these two kindred spirits. Madame de Graffigny, the clever authoress of the "Peruvian Letters," spent a few weeks with them. The amiable President Hénault also appeared there, bringing with him all the philosophic satire and scandal which Madame du Deffand was gathering in her convent of Saint-Joseph. A Prussian count sent by Frederick, then crown prince of Prussia, visited Cirey, in order to present the portrait of his master to Voltaire, and indifferent verses to Venus-Newton, as the prince styled Madame du Chatelet. Madame Denise, the favourite gossiping niece of Voltaire, D'Argens, the sceptical author of the "Jewish Letters," likewise spent some time at Cirey; besides such scientific men as Maupertuis, Kœnig, Clairault, and Algarotti, who came chiefly for the purpose of conversing with Madame du Chatelet; pursuing their mutual studies in her apartment, to the great annoyance of Voltaire, who condescended to feel somewhat jealous on these occasions. Notwithstanding his secret vexation, he treated Madame du Chatelet's learned guests with due courtesy. "We read," he observes during the stay of Algarotti, "a few cantos of 'Jeanne la Pucelle,' or one of my tragedies, or a chapter from the 'Siècle of Louis XIV.' Thence we return to Locke and Newton; nor do we abstain from champagne and good cheer, for, indeed, we are very voluptuous philosophers." The tact of Madame du Chatelet diversi-

fied these amusements. She sang and played for the pleasure of her guests; or, with the aid of a few neighbours and Voltaire, acted his tragedies and comedies, on a pretty little stage, which she had caused to be constructed for that purpose. As she was an excellent actress, especially in comic parts, these entertainments proved really amusing. When Voltaire was unwell, Madame du Chatelet relinquished study and pleasure, in order to sit by his bedside and read to him the works of Cicero, Virgil, Pope, or Newton, in the original languages.

Madame du Chatelet and her lover did not, however, spend the whole of their time at Cirey. They visited Paris every year, and remained for a few months at the hotel Richelieu. The young duchess, a woman remarkable for her beauty, accomplishments, and for the passionate attachment she felt to the last for her faithless husband, was the intimate friend of Madame du Chatelet; who, as well as Voltaire, had been instrumental in effecting her marriage. She studied geometry under Maupertuis, and her knowledge of Newton's philosophy even enabled her to obtain a triumph recorded by Voltaire.*

Madame du Chatelet entered into the pursuit of pleasure with the same passionate eagerness with which she studied Newton's "Principia" in her learned retirement. Her brief sojourn in Paris was accordingly marked by a round of dissipation and amusements. As a relaxation, she occasionally gave choice déjeûners in a country auberge, to which no man was admitted. Her guests were Madame du Deffand, the profligate Madame de Boufflers, Madame de Mailly—then the king's mistress, Madame du Gonvernet, and the pretty Madame de la Popelinière. These ladies, all handsome and witty, greatly enjoyed their privacy.

* "Il faut, pourtant, vous dire, à l'honneur de notre cour de Versailles et à l'honneur des femmes, que Madame de Richelieu a fait un cours de physique dans cette salle des machines; qu'elle est devenue une assez bonne Newtonienne; et qu'elle a confondu publiquement certain prédicateur Jésuite qui ne savait que des mots, et qui s'avisa de disputer, en bavard, contre des faits et contre de l'esprit. Il fut hué avec son éloquence, et Madame de Richelieu d'autant plus admirée qu'elle est femme et duchesse."

The excessive love of dress displayed by the learned Emilie, which had induced Voltaire to name her Madame Newton-Pompom du Chatelet, often led her into serious expenses; nothing equalled, however, by the large sums she lost at play. On one night she lost no less than 80,000 livres at Versailles. Voltaire imprudently told her that she had to deal with cheats. This remark having been overheard, he was obliged to leave the palace precipitately, and seek for a refuge at Sceaux, where Madame du Maine agreed to conceal him. For six weeks he remained hidden in an upper room, writing by candle-light, and no one but Madame du Maine herself being aware of his presence. When all the inmates were at rest, he came down, supped with the duchess, and read to her fragments of his prose novels, which he had composed partly for her amusement. In the meanwhile, Madame du Chatelet was busy collecting money to pay the sum she had lost, and endeavoured to pacify the persons to whom Voltaire's imprudent remark had given offence. It was not until she had succeeded in effecting both objects, that she made her appearance at Sceaux with Voltaire.

If we may trust the petulant effusions of the ennuyée Madame de Staal to her friend Madame du Deffand, the learned pair were little appreciated by the society of Sceaux, on this visit, as well as on the subsequent ones they paid to Madame du Maine. "Madame du Chatelet and Voltaire," she observes in 1747, "who had announced their arrival for to-day, appeared yesterday, towards midnight, like two ghosts, bringing with them a smell of embalmed corpses from their tombs. Every one had already left the table; but they were famished spectres, and wanted some supper. They, moreover, required beds, which were not prepared. The porter, who was already in bed, had to rise hastily. Gaya having offered his apartment, in case of need, was now obliged to give it up. He effected his removal with as much precipitation and displeasure as an army surprised in its camp and leaving part of its baggage in the power of the foe." Further on she resumes the subject with the same irony: "Our ghosts do not shew them-

selves by daylight: they appeared yesterday at ten in the evening. I do not suppose we shall see them earlier to-day. One is busy narrating high deeds, the other comments on Newton. Madame du Chatelet has already changed her apartment three times: she could endure no longer that which she had chosen. It was full of noise and smoke, without any fire," (I rather look on this as her emblem.) "She is now taking a review of her 'principles.' She renews this practice every year, as they might escape otherwise, and go so far that she would never find one of them again. I verily believe her head is their stronghold, and not the place of their birth. She does well to watch over them carefully."

The merits of Madame du Chatelet were not indeed likely to be fully appreciated by the frivolous court of Madame du Maine. But though she devoted the whole of the day to study, she contributed in the evening to the general amusement by singing and acting the pastoral play of "Issé," and Voltaire's comedies, with so much talent that even Madame de Staal confessed herself amused. Voltaire addressed his mistress thus:—

"Charmante Issé! vous nous faites entendre
Dans ces beaux lieux les sons les plus flatteurs—
Ils vont droit à nos cœurs;
Leibnitz n'a point de nomades plus tendres,
Newton d'x x plus enchanteurs."

But notwithstanding all his poetical compliments, poor Voltaire was singularly annoyed by his "charmante Issé," who, regardless of an author's feelings, but by no means indifferent to the success of her charms, persisted in appearing in the part of the homely Mademoiselle de la Cochonnière, attired with all the elegance of a court lady. Voltaire remonstrated; but, as Madame de Staal pithily observed, "She is the mistress; he is the slave."

After spending a few months in Paris, Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet generally returned to their pleasant retreat. Events occasionally caused them to separate: their correspondence was then extremely active. According to Voisenon, Ma-

dame du Chatelet had eight thick volumes of Voltaire's letters. The same authority asserts that they contained more epigrams against religion than verses in the praise of his mistress: a fact not at all unlikely. These letters were probably destroyed by the family of Madame du Chatelet after her death, for nothing of them has remained.

Long as the love of Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet had lasted, it was not destined to resist time and habit. The first change came from Voltaire. His increasing coldness alarmed Madame du Chatelet. When she first spoke to him on the subject, he reminded her of his declining years, and answered her reproaches by the charming verses—

"Si vous voulez que j'aime encore,
Ah, rendez moi l'âge des amours!" &c.

After many stormy explanations, Madame du Chatelet, seeing that friendship had replaced love in Voltaire's heart, submitted to this change in his feelings; which caused none in their mode of life. An affection which could thus resist time and modify itself with years, instead of perishing utterly, must have been founded on much that was good and true.

In this altered mood the two friends proceeded from Cirey to Lunéville, where Stanislaus, the father of Marie Lecsinska, ruled over a polished and elegant little court. It was there that Madame du Chatelet first saw Saint-Lambert. He was then nothing more than a handsome young nobleman of elegant address: he afterwards obtained some reputation by his cold imitations of the English poets; but his was indeed a "tiny genius," as Walpole justly remarked. He is less known for any individual merits of his own, than for having been the successful rival in love of the two greatest writers of the age—Voltaire and Rousseau. Madame du Chatelet was still handsome; her great talents caused her to be universally admired. Vanity induced Saint-Lambert to pay her attentions which Madame du Chatelet attributed to a deeper feeling, and which she was frail enough to return by a very sincere affection. Voltaire, on discovering that he had a rival, felt both grieved and indignant. His first impulse was to

leave Madame du Chatelet immediately. Though she disguised nothing from him, her remonstrances and assurances of unabated friendship induced him to remain. Saint-Lambert, by great professions of admiration for the genius of Voltaire, even succeeded in conciliating his favour. The self-love of the poet proved stronger than the remnant of jealousy with which he had seen another possess the place he had once held in the heart of the divine Emilie.

There is little to excuse this part of Madame du Chatelet's life. Her age, and that feeling of worldly self-respect which is inspired by the fear of ridicule, ought at least to have preserved her from this last error; with which were connected many disgraceful circumstances, and which was destined to prove so fatal to her.

After a brief stay at Lunéville, Madame du Chatelet and Voltaire parted from Saint-Lambert and returned to Cirey. Madame du Chatelet seemed extremely anxious to finish her great work, the translation of Newton's "Principia:" she laboured at it both day and night, and appeared to possess a foreboding of her melancholy fate. Neither the efforts of Voltaire nor the letters of Saint-Lambert could remove her despondency. On her return to Lunéville, her health, which had been failing for some time, became worse, and on the 10th of August 1749, she died in childbed, after a few days of brief illness.

Voltaire was overwhelmed with despair, and his grief was both lasting and sincere. Shortly after the death of Madame du Chatelet, we find him writing thus to D'Argental:—

"I am going to Cirey for two days. Thence I shall go to spend two days more with a friend of this great man and this unhappy woman. . . . . I will even acknowledge to you, that a house which she once inhabited, though it may overwhelm me with grief, is not disagreeable to me. I do not dread my affliction; I do not avoid that which may remind me of her: I like Cirey; I could not bear Lunéville, where I lost her in a more melancholy manner than you can imagine. But the place which she once embellished is dear to me. It

is not a mistress that I have lost: I have lost the half of my being—a soul for which mine was made—a friend of twenty years, whom I had known since her birth. The most tender father feels no different love for his only daughter. I like to find a memorial of her everywhere."

There is much that is touching in these simple expressions of grief; much that explains, better than the most elaborate commentary, the affection which united Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet.

Scarcely was the unhappy woman in her grave, when all the opprobrium, all the bitter revilings, which malice and envy could rouse against her, followed her memory. There is something literally revolting in the brutality with which the errors of Madame du Chatelet were attacked. Her intimate friend, Madame du Deffand, distinguished herself by her bitterness. She wrote, and caused to be extensively circulated, a portrait of the deceased lady, in which her person and her life were equally villified. When this production was shewn by the author to Thomas, he coolly observed, that it reminded him of an observation once made by a medical acquaintance of his concerning one of his patients: "My friend fell ill; I attended him. He died; and I dissected him." We do not intend to justify Madame du Chatelet: she doubtless committed great errors; but those who attacked and held up her failings to the pitiless derision of the world had no right to do so. Madame du Chatelet erred because she adopted their principles, and put them into practice: three times in her life she had wandered from the straight path. Would Madame du Deffand and her associates in malice have been able to specify the number of their errors? She was frail, when they were profligate: she yielded to passion, when they gave themselves up to licentiousness. The real cause why Madame du Chatelet's memory was treated with so much bitterness was her great superiority to most of the women with whom she associated. She equalled them in that graceful wit of which they were so vain, but she disdained to apply it to the purpose of gathering around her a coterie of ad-

mirers; and she surpassed them, not only by that dignified disdain, but also by a superiority of intellect, and by an aptitude for science to which few women have attained. It was this, and to have fascinated such a man as Voltaire, that could not be, and was not, forgiven.

Those who would have had some right to speak—the women whose pure and unblemished lives were the open condemnation of Madame du Chatelet's errors—remained silent; the task of upbraiding her memory was left to her former friends: to those who, during her lifetime, would have derided her scruples, had she manifested any. Some there were, however, besides Voltaire and her intimate friends, who, whilst they were not blind to her errors, could acknowledge Madame du Chatelet's high qualities. Amongst these was Clairault, who had been one of her instructors: he testified the deepest grief on hearing of her death, and immediately went into mourning; he was never heard to speak of her but with mingled admiration and respect. The grief of Voltaire naturally subsided with time; but he never forgot Madame du Chatelet. When he mentioned her name, it was with a tender feeling of regret for her loss, and an enthusiastic admiration of her great talents. After her death, he chiefly resided in Switzerland; where, as it was his lot to be swayed by women, he submitted to the dominion of the extravagant Madame Denis. As he grew in years, Voltaire increased in power and fame. All the sovereigns of Europe paid their court to the illustrious patriarch of Ferney. The man who was rapidly and surely aiding the destruction of society, was still, as a token of the times, its cherished idol.

If so much space—with regard to the limits of this work—has been devoted to Madame du Chatelet, it is not merely on account of her own personal merits, or even because of her connexion with Voltaire. The reader who wishes to know what the aristocracy of those times really were, can judge of them now, better than by any mere assertion of the author. Madame du Chatelet is a very favourable and appropriate

illustration of her class. Her relaxed morals—the mixture of pride, worldliness, and intellect, by which she was distinguished—her strong tendency towards what was then called philosophy—her external observance of every *convenance*—and her total want of religious feeling—are alike characteristic of her station and of her age. The few incidents of her life are equally significant. Her connexion with Voltaire, (which, on account of the great difference of rank between them, would have been an event unheard of a century earlier;) the easy tolerance of her husband; the facility with which Voltaire himself allowed Saint-Lambert to replace him in her affections, alike betray the gradual decline of the old nobles, and the increasing corruption of the times. But though it is chiefly as a sample of what the women of high rank then really were that Madame du Chatelet has been considered here, it is not intended to assert that she had no personal influence. Far from it; she not only contributed to spread among her countrymen a greater knowledge of scientific matters, but, by her own example, added to the strength of the Anglomania which was already beginning to prevail in France.

Voltaire, Madame du Chatelet, and Montesquieu were among the first who introduced into polite society the admiration of England. The regent, before his accession to power, and whilst still under the dominion of Louis XIV., had loudly praised, with his roués, that independence which existed in the neighbouring country. His own personal sympathies connected him with the House of Hanover, and to which his mother was allied. Even then the Orleans branch of the royal family was suspected of a wish to profit by the errors of the reigning Bourbons, as the House of Hanover had taken advantage of the errors of the Stuarts. Montesquieu brought back from England his enthusiastic admiration of freedom and constitutional monarchy; Voltaire partly derived his scepticism from the English philosophers; Madame du Chatelet's object was science. As a woman she could spread her predilections with greater ease than the most gifted men. Fashion then ruled everything: scepticism itself would not have suc-

ceeded if it had not been fashionable. The influence of Madame du Chatelet with regard to the admiration of England, and all that was English, is not therefore to be slighted. This admiration of a foreign country soon became a powerful means of opposition at home with the philosophic party. When women had lent their aid to this feeling, it became omnipotent. The supreme bon ton henceforth was to affect English manners at court, and Prussian discipline in the army. This apparently anti-national movement was pregnant with a great truth: France looked up to foreign nations for her model, because she saw in herself nothing to admire or venerate.

The influence which Madame du Chatelet exercised in this respect was not felt so much during her lifetime as after her death. Her name was then no slight authority for those who maintained the superiority of everything English over French.

We have now done with this remarkable woman: for such, with all her errors, she undoubtedly was, if we judge her, as we are in fairness bound to do, after the standard of her own times. Judged by that standard, she will not soon be forgotten. Madame du Chatelet is now chiefly remembered for her devotedness to science: her labours have indeed been far outstripped, and, if her works are still known, they are probably no longer read; but science, like all that is intellectual and great, ennobles those who once toiled in her cause. Even though they should have effected but little, and though that little should be useless now, yet, whilst it is known that in their day they added their mite to the great store of universal knowledge, their names will be long and gratefully remembered.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PHILOSOPHERS—LITERARY SOCIETIES—MADAME D'EPINAY —ROUSSEAU.

FROM the learned retirement of Circy we must now return to the Parisian world. The philosophic party had there made rapid strides since the days of Madame de Tencin and Madame de la Popelinière: bureaux d'esprit were now opened to them on every side.

The history of French philosophy during the eighteenth century is, in reality, the history of that century itself. Reverses in war, dishonourable peace, confusion and misery at home, successively marked the sway of Louis XV. The political personages of those times were the favourites of the Pompadours and the Du Barrys. But for the intellectual action of the nation itself, a more insignificant and disgraceful reign could not be found in the annals of France.

Without determining the merits or demerits of this philosophy, it cannot but be considered as the completion of a great intellectual movement, in progress since the reformation. Almost every century is characterised by a spirit of agitation, indicating an advance in the human mind with regard to the intellectual or to the social condition of man. Thus, during the sixteenth century, France was convulsed by the great Catholic league; which, whilst opposing heresy, was in reality a protest against power, and in favour of the national institutions. In this respect it strongly resembled the revolutionary spirit of England in the seventeenth century, when religious dissensions led to the triumph of civil freedom. This struggle was continued in France during the following century, by the political intrigues of the Fronde, and the persistency of

Jansenism; through which forms the decaying nobility and the partisans of intellectual freedom vainly opposed the personal tyranny of the monarch.

The philosophy of the eighteenth century took a bolder and more certain aim. Instead of making creed the means of attack, it attacked creed itself, as the very basis of authority. Philosophy, which had previously been linked with religion now became its irreconcilable foe. Ideas replaced creeds and doctrines. The privileged classes themselves hastened the crisis. Nobles, authors, men of science, and women of the world, all united in the common task of destruction: the whole nation seemed to have gathered up its strength in order to bring down the old and tottering social edifice. The revolution was the close of that eventful drama, which had been progressing through three centuries, always in spite of the persevering opposition of the reigning sovereigns. Moral death and fearful ruin seemed the only result of this wide devastation; but from these ruins of feudalism and absolute power sprang forth a nation. Before examining the influence which women possessed over this movement we must speak of the philosophy, which was one of its most important signs.

We shall do so as briefly as possible. To the spiritualism of Descartes and Leibnitz succeeded the doctrines of Locke, which were introduced into France towards the beginning of the eighteenth century. The soul ceased to occupy the attention of metaphysicians: they concluded it to lie beyond their province, and asserted that all our ideas and impressions are derived from the senses. Condillac, by his admirable clearness, popularised these doctrines. The ease with which they were understood, and their correspondence with the feelings of the age, rendered them still more universal. Sensation was the test to which men submitted faith and morality. The existence of God, of the soul, and of a future state, was no longer confessed. Some, indeed, still clung to these great principles; but their number was extremely limited. The laxity of morals favoured, and perhaps created, this gross materialism. This is more probable than the assertion that

these doctrines led to the general profligacy. Creeds are oftener fashioned according to our actions, than our actions are derived from creeds. It was natural that those who only lived for voluptuous enjoyments should seek, in a sensual philosophy, the justification of their conduct. Literature and philosophy are not always the guides of the age in which they flourish. They express the feelings of men, but do not sway them exclusively. Like constitutional monarchs, they reign but do not govern. Too much of unmixed condemnation has therefore been thrown on the French philosophers: they only followed the general current, and interpreted the opinions of their age; but because they acted as the organs of public feeling, they were assumed to be its leaders.

Whilst Condillac laid bare the springs of analytic philosophy, Helvetius expounded its moral tendencies in his "De l'Esprit," a work more famous than read. It is said that the wish of explaining to a lady a chapter of Locke, which she did not understand, made Helvetius begin this laborious work. His whole life was a proof of the power of female opinion. The wish of pleasing women, and winning the distinction their approbation conferred, first drew him from the voluptuous obscurity for which he was naturally fitted. After learning how to dance better than the famous Dupré, whom he is said to have occasionally replaced at the opera, Helvetius gave himself up to fencing. On beholding Maupertuis surrounded by a crowd of fashionable ladies in the Tuileries, he resolved to study geometry. Not satisfied with his progress in this science, and dazzled by the glory of Voltaire, he wrote a long dull poem on happiness. The success of Montesquieu's "Esprit des Lois" acted more powerfully still on his ambition. Resigning his post of farmer-general, he married, and retired into the country, where he spent ten years in writing his philosophical work. In this pernicious production Helvetius embodied all the doctrines of the philosophers in whose intercourse he had lived, reducing to a system the conversations of his friends. This he did with so much grossness, that the philosophers themselves were revolted; but, the religious

party having foolishly persecuted him, his friends were compelled to defend him through mere esprit de corps, and they thus gave him a celebrity he would never have enjoyed otherwise. Helvetius was disappointed and terrified. He was timid by nature, and believing himself surrounded with dangers, he retracted, in the most humiliating terms, the doctrines he had professed in his work, neither pacifying the devout party nor securing the approbation of the philosophers by his conduct.

The work of Helvetius was not the worst of its class. La Mettrie far surpassed him in the licentiousness and impiety of his productions. It was said of him by the atheistical Marquis d'Argens, "that he preached the theory of sin with the shamelessness of a fool." La Mettrie was bitterly persecuted in France and in Holland, but he found a refuge in Berlin, where Frederick II. kept him till his death. Schlosser, the German historian, thus speaks of the success his productions obtained :—"The works of this dissolute and sensual reviler of every serious principle, and of every higher effort, which perhaps no one in our times would notice, found a rapid sale in that dark age, because he directed his attention to the public, who took delight in scandal and sensuality. He compiled and mutilated the works of other persons, abused Haller and Boerhaave, and filled his writings to loathing with the comfortless doctrines of sin; which he announced and propagated with a vehemence approaching to madness: notwithstanding all this, they were collected twice after his death, and were read with eagerness and curiosity by the higher classes; for, at that time, and on many grounds, such works never came into the hands of the lower."

Such facts are deeply significant. To judge of the spirit of an age merely by the eminent men it has produced and admired, is, generally speaking, to judge erroneously. Genius is of all time, and borrows comparatively little evil from its own epoch: that little is modified by originality, and softened down by taste. But mediocrity, having less resources in itself, is compelled, in order to insure success, to draw largely

on the passions and prejudices of contemporary readers. If we wish to see how far these feelings may be carried; into what excesses they may lead a commonplace mind—which is always the best representative of a certain epoch; for genius is by its nature exceptional—it is only necessary to open some now forgotten but then admired production. It is thus in every age; and thus it was in the eighteenth century. Never was second-rate literature so licentious and debased, because never perhaps was the higher literature less poetical and noble. According to the testimony of an author, not suspected of severity, Collé and Crébillon the younger were chaste writers in comparison with most of the novelists of the times. The works of these novelists were, however, read and admired; for, whilst they ministered to a corrupt taste, they did not fail to assume the philosophic tone which insured their success, and then pervaded everything: in this case a revolting union. The evil of such productions does not rest wholly with the philosophers. The different classes of society were then all equally degraded and corrupt. The bourgeois and the nobles, the philosophers and their antagonists, all shared in the general laxity of morals of the age. It was not, indeed, by austerity that the philosophers sought to propagate their doctrines. Christianity had established the spiritual equality of man, by calling all to share in a glorious immortality; the philosophers of the eighteenth century founded the same equality on the degradations of humanity. All were equal, because all were equally corrupt.

It is sad to confess, but it is nevertheless true, that women did little to purify society from this general degradation. They shared in it, and may almost be said to have made it worse, since they authorised it by their example. A few women, indeed, were to be found, even amongst the aristocracy, who calmly adhered to the simple virtues of Christianity, in spite of all the philosophical arguments to the contrary; but they lived unheeded, and passed away forgotten. None but the brilliant friends of the philosophers could hope for

that reputation of talent and wit which was then the universal object of female envy.

But who, it will perhaps be asked, were those philosophers? How came they to exercise so much power? The philosophers were dissolute financiers who gave dinners to men of letters; they were writers with or without talent, who had attacked morals and revelation. Amateurs who had nothing better to do were philosophers. Women, bishops, courtiers, and ministers, philosophised like the rest. Philosophy, in short, had become the spirit of the nation; and in this lay the secret of its power. Everything betrayed the inroads it had made. The word Nature had superseded the holy name of God; priests in the pulpit spoke not of Jesus Christ, but of "the Legislator of the Christians." Men and women of rank attacked the privileges of their order, and spoke contemptuously of the Middle Ages, to which they owed their wealth and power. The nobles still possessed their false honour, which consists in never shrinking from danger, and never allowing an insult to pass unrevenged; but this feeling was one they had always considered exclusively their own, and they now rashly endeavoured to destroy the religious morality which even their own haughty code granted to the sons of the serfs.

Many of the philosophers were, doubtless, better than the principles they professed; and if they too often considered pleasure the great end of man, yet they certainly gave the name of pleasure to what every creed calls virtue. But when doctrines or institutions are concerned, nothing should be considered so much as the principle on which they are based; for it is that alone which can be really said to survive. The philosophers did not trouble themselves with such considerations. Intoxicated by the general applause, they assumed a vain and arrogant tone. Their scepticism being scarcely contradicted, had soon all the intolerance which naturally belongs to fashion. The extravagant praises of Frederick of Prussia and of the Empress Catherine, raised their vanity still more. Frederick, indeed, soon quarrelled with his protégés, and

shewed them that, in reality, he had no wish to place power and intellect on a level; but the mischief was done, and there were few things in heaven or earth which escaped the philosophic sway. The most modest contented themselves with teaching monarchs their high duties through means of dull philosophic romances, like Marmontel's "Bélisaire." Instead of considering themselves the creatures of the age, they candidly thought they had called into existence the very feelings which they themselves obeyed, and without which they would never have been known, save as literary men of little originality and ordinary talents. The high esteem in which they were held by the ladies who ruled over the Parisian world, and who would have thought their societies incomplete without the presence of at least one philosopher, heightened this feeling. They began to respect their own inspirations, and to consider all opposition to them as the result of fanaticism and tyranny. They mistook the selfish human wish of governing despotically for a holy zeal in the cause of humanity; and few mistakes are so fatal as those into which men fall with regard to their real motives of action.

The leaders of this party were often more moderate and clear-sighted than their disciples, whose imprudence they sought to repress; but such attempts were effectually checked by the murmurs they created. The philosophic chiefs naturally relinquished a repressive course foreign to their own inclinations, and which could only endanger their popularity. The control which government sought to exercise was useless: it was often insincere. Every one confessed the existence of radical evils; a few threw the whole blame on the philosophers, and thought to cure the disease by checking its external symptoms. But government had actually no arms with which to contend against opponents supported by public opinion. It was natural that society should favour doctrines which taught people to despise a state of things it was no longer possible to respect.

It was this consciousness of their strength which rendered the philosophers so intolerant. No opinions but those they

professed could obtain a fair hearing. Their social tyranny was such that many men of talent—but not gifted with sufficient independence of mind—did not dare to acknowledge their religious sentiments, and professed an atheistical creed foreign to their real belief. Naigeon, the atheist, was called by his own friends "L'Athée Inquisiteur," on account of his excessive intolerance. The moderate Duclos proposed to extirpate Protestantism, which he considered a political evil, by depriving the Protestants of their civil rights, and interdicting the public exercise of their worship. He seemed to consider this a humane and liberal suggestion. It is unjust to lay to the clergy and the Jesuits the sole odium of the intolerance which then prevailed. Intolerance is an attribute of the human mind, and not of any particular creed or opinion.

The great facility with which the name of philosopher was acquired increased the tribe. Vanity made more proselytes than conviction. The heathen philosophers were men who distinguished themselves from the crowd either by their doctrines or by their mode of life; the French philosophers, on the contrary, had nothing so peculiar as their similarity to the world with which they lived, and whose opinions and prejudices they fully adopted. The influence which women exercised over the doctrines of the philosophers was more in the form which those doctrines took than in their substance. Women have feelings, but seldom opinions of their own. To the philosophy of the eighteenth century they imparted some of their own thoughtless frivolousness, with a passion and enthusiasm, and consequently an impulsive power, it could not have possessed otherwise. No great movement, intellectual or political, in which the women did not share, could then have succeeded in France. By enlisting the sympathies of these powerful auxiliaries in their cause, the philosophers knew that they insured ultimate success; inclination and policy led them to adopt the complaisant and subservient tone with which they have been so bitterly reproached. The women of these times also greatly contributed to widen that

separation between the court and Parisian society which had begun under the ministry of Fleury.

This was especially apparent in the altered tone of the stage. Under Louis XIV. the decisions of the court in theatrical matters preceded those of the public. The reverse was the case in the eighteenth century, when the public gave a decidedly democratic direction to the popular plays. This philosophic and declamatory tone was modified by female influence: the women inspired the desire of something more true and more touching than could be afforded by the stately misfortunes of royal sufferers. The sentimental comedy, "comédie larmoyante," as its antagonists named it, succeeded to the royal tragedy of Louis XIV. A woman was the first who discovered this change in the taste of the public. Mademoiselle Quinault, one of the popular actresses of the day, and a woman of great originality and talent, advised Voltaire to create a mixed sort of drama. He laughed at her advice; which was, however, followed by La Chaussée. The great success his sentimental comedies obtained shewed the correctness of Mademoiselle Quinault's surmise. Voltaire endeavoured to eclipse him, but failed in the attempt: a fact which proves how very far he was from leading the taste of the age.

The increasing power of women was chiefly displayed by the patronage they extended towards the philosophers who frequented their bureaux d'esprits. They were not, however, the only supports of the philosophic party. M. de la Popelinière, and the farmer-general, Le Pelletier, received the artists and literary men of the times. Helvetius and D'Holbach, themselves philosophers, forwarded their cause, and acquired some celebrity—apart from their own personal merits—by giving costly entertainments to their friends. Helvetius gave dinners because he wanted ideas: he never spoke himself, or he at least spoke very little; his object was to create discussions in which he took no share. He listened to his guests, and noted in his mind all the striking and original remarks uttered in the heat of the moment. The dinners of

Helvetius proved attractive from the variety of eminent persons who were anxious to see the author of "De l'Esprit;" but the want of a presiding spirit was always sure to be felt.

The entertainments of the German baron D'Holbach were more interesting. For twenty-five years he drew around him the most celebrated atheists of the times, and spent large sums to forward their doctrines. Diderot, who converted him to atheism, the impatient Duclos, Helvetius, Saint-Lambert, Grimm, Marmontel, and, for a short time, Rousseau, La Harpe, D'Alembert, Morellet, Raynal, and the little Abbé Galiani, were successively the chief supports of the Epicurean baron's society. The objects of their indiscriminate attacks,—and they met for no other purpose than to attack,—were religion and authority. The best means of carrying their aim into effect were fully discussed at table, and in the presence of the servants, who transmitted their subversive doctrines to the lower classes. The so-called philosophers aimed, however, at nothing so definite as a revolution; but they felt that their task was to destroy, and accomplished it with fanatic zeal. D'Holbach himself spared neither his time nor his money in order to propagate his doctrines. His vast learning rendered him no contemptible opponent. No less than one hundred and forty-seven anonymous productions of infidel tendency are supposed to have been written under his direction, and printed at his expense. Voltaire, for persisting to believe in the existence of a God, was little respected by this coterie, and those who based their faith on its decisions. "C'est un bigot: il est déiste," was the petulant exclamation of a lady who had adopted D'Holbach's atheism. But, though openly maintained, atheism was not exclusively professed in this circle. Whilst Diderot and his host asserted their principles in the most absolute manner, Morellet, Rousseau, and a few more, declared themselves theists, and warmly defended their opinions. The versatile and unprincipled Abbé Galiani shewed his skill as an improvisatore by one day speaking in favour of the existence of a Supreme Being, and attacking the same principle on their next meeting. With such blasphemous

levity did these men treat a question so great and so momentous. Disgusted with the manner in which they professed their doctrines, Duclos once impatiently exclaimed—"That band of little impious fellows will end by making me go to confession." D'Alembert ended by wholly withdrawing from them.

The influence of this coterie of atheists over the eighteenth century was very great. They succeeded in popularising their desolating doctrines, and in extending the sway of atheism. The power of D'Holbach differed, however, very essentially from that of the women of his time: he had to toil assiduously for his popularity; and when, through motives of economy, he reduced his good cheer, he had the mortification of being deserted by some of his most influential friends. He was, indeed, as Galiani very freely and impertinently observed, the "maître d'hôtel of philosophy." With all his learning, he could never rise above commonplace talent; nor was his personal character very attractive. Vain, capricious, and selfish, he once boasted that, "though he had lived all his life with irritable and indigent men of letters, he could not recollect that he had either quarrelled with, or done the smallest service to any of them." The phlegmatic baron was, nevertheless, an honest man; but it is easy to conceive that his dinners, however excellent, lacked the charm of variety, and that liveliness which was the chief characteristic of female society. His dull and learned atheism did not suit every taste: the philosophers, accordingly, ate his dinners, but preferred the intercourse of a few talented women, who neither assumed D'Holbach's dogmatic tone nor exercised over the opinions of their guests the intolerance to which he was too much prone.

Besides the three famous bureaux d'esprit, to which we shall presently allude, there were several less formal societies, presided over by ladies who received their philosophic friends, but who did not make this their sole occupation. One of those ladies was a clever Englishwoman, Mrs Edward Montague, who defended the genius of Shakspeare against the

sarcasms of Voltaire, and who opened her house to the aristocratic and intellectual portion of French society. She eclipsed the farmers-general by the magnificence of her style of living; and acquired a considerable degree of importance by her discussions with Voltaire in France and Johnson in England.

Mademoiselle Quinault, the actress, also gathered a little coterie of free-thinking noblemen and celebrated authors around her. Her friends, with a doubtful sort of flattery, called her "the Ninon of the eighteenth century." Her suppers were excellent, and her manners very free: a few titled ladies, who could not resist the temptation of coming to those suppers, might occasionally be seen amongst her guests; but they avoided acknowledging in public this breach of the *convenances.*

Voltaire's favourite niece, Madame Denis, an ugly, agreeable woman, who wrote tragedies she could never get acted, likewise gave a few pleasant suppers to her friends. Voltaire was glad to join them, whenever he could escape from the jealous surveillance of Madame du Chatelet.

The society of Madame d'Epinay was still more important. Without being very clever or very handsome, Madame d'Epinay was an attractive woman. She never had a regular bureau d'esprit, which rendered her house more pleasant than it could otherwise have been. She established in her circle a philosophic ease and freedom, authorised by her secondary position in society. Authors, artists, men and women of the world, met there without restraint; and not for the sole and express purpose of philosophising and uttering clever paradoxes. Her society, indeed, was neither brilliant nor renowned: perhaps it was not very amusing, for Madame d'Epinay had little of what is called wit, and still less originality; but it was at least free and natural. Whilst they were in her house, her guests consented to doff that philosophic armour, through which posterity has found it so difficult to discern their real features. Madame d'Epinay abstained from exercising over her friends a control for which she was little adapted. She possessed judgment and penetration; but she had no imagination, no

originality, and very little taste. She derived pleasure from the intercourse of clever people, but she could not afford them much entertainment herself: her conversation was cold and somewhat commonplace; she yielded almost instinctively to the opinions of those in whose intimacy she lived; she was caustic with Grimm and sentimental with Rousseau: she would not have been either one or the other if left to her own impulses. The same traits characterised her writings; for, though gifted with very little imagination, Madame d'Epinay was always engaged in some literary labour. Whenever she attempted high composition she failed; but her epistolary style was good, and she excelled in easy gossiping narrative. It was less design than accident which procured Madame d'Epinay her philosophic connexions. Her lover, Francœil, was one of the early patrons of J. J. Rousseau, whom he introduced to her; and Rousseau, in his turn, made her become acquainted with Diderot, D'Holbach, and Grimm. M. d'Epinay, a wealthy and dissolute financier, had, as usual, nothing to do with the connexions of his wife. But he, at least, may be said to have deserved his fate. Diderot, with equal truth and severity, observed of him, "that he had squandered two millions without uttering one criticism or performing one good action."

Madame d'Epinay seems to have been naturally inclined to virtue, but the example of her husband had a pernicious influence on her character. Disgusted with the vices of M. d'Epinay, she formed an attachment for M. de Francœil, with whose friends she was soon on intimate terms. The social position of Madame d'Epinay not being very high, she had more external freedom than was enjoyed by the ladies of rank. Her own conduct, and the profligacy of her husband, rendered her still more independent of the opinion of the world. She made, therefore, no scruple of receiving men whom the upper circles still eschewed, and was soon intimate with all the leaders of the philosophic sect. Diderot, however, she could not secure; he was always ill at ease in the polite world. Too great a portion of his life had been spent in very questionable society for him to acquire the aristocratic elegance which distinguished

Voltaire. This was, perhaps, why, with all his fervid eloquence, Diderot often failed in producing the effect which might have been anticipated from his great talents. His mind was too vast and his manner too vehement for the artificial society in which he was compelled to move. His friends said that he should have been a Grecian philosopher, teaching his disciples in the gardens of Academia. Diderot himself thought so, and was proud of the appellation of Socrates-Diderot, even whilst he ministered, with licentious productions, to the depraved taste of the age. He presented the not uncommon phenomenon of a man whose mind was superior to his writings; thus his works are no longer read, whilst his name still stands foremost amongst the names of that period.

It was the caustic German, Grimm, the successor of Francœil in Madame d'Epinay's affections, who held the most conspicuous place in her circle; where his despotic disposition, and his habit of covering his face with a coating of red and white paint, caused him to be familiarly named "Tyran le Blanc." The lively little Abbé Galiani also stood high in Madame d'Epinay's good graces. They wrote one another clever letters, full of smart sayings, and destined to be inserted in Grimm's correspondence with his German patron. How far, moreover, these letters may be considered confidential, and relied upon as such, can be seen by Madame d'Epinay's remark, in answer to an observation of Galiani's: "It is insupportable of you to remind me that our correspondence will be printed after our death. *I knew it;* but had forgotten all about it. Immortality terrifies me dreadfully." What a pity that all the correspondences of those times bear traces of the same knowledge; that letters were not then written off merely for the look of a friend, but were leisurely indited with an eye to posterity, and a very natural wish of appearing to advantage before this severe and impartial judge!

A few foreigners of distinction, the most eminent of whom was Hume, also made their appearance in the circle of Madame d'Epinay. Hume then enjoyed in the Parisian circles so high a degree of reputation, that a lady was disgraced at court for

having asked who and what he was. He was a philosopher and an Englishman; he appeared at a period when French society and the ladies who presided over it felt the want of some attractive novelty; it was natural that Hume should be exalted as a prodigy, and eagerly sought as such in every fashionable circle. He was at first thought admirably adapted to enact his part in the frivolous amusements then in fashion; but, though once placed in the character of a sultan between two of the prettiest women of the day, the English philosopher, after much rumination, and repeatedly striking his breast, found nothing better to say, during a whole quarter of an hour, than: "*Eh bien! mes demoiselles. Eh bien! vous voilà, donc. Eh bien! vous violà . . vous voilà ici.*" Hume's reputation was fortunately too well established to suffer from what would have ruined another man. He was still cajoled and caressed in every Parisian circle; where he received, with philosophic phlegm and gravity, the lavish praise of his admirers. Madame d'Epinay, without admiring exclusively the "gros et grande historiographe d'Angleterre," and whilst complaining that his conduct lowered the philosophic dignity, was not sorry to display him to her friends.

Many individuals of secondary note also adorned her circle; the frank Duclos and the elegant Saint-Lambert were amongst her intimate friends, as well as an obscure and needy author, whom one of her female acquaintances cavalierly described as "a poor fellow, as poor as Job, a sort of dependant on Madame Dupin, Francœil's mother, but full of wit and vanity." This individual was no other than a M. J. J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, the scarcely known author of a comedy entitled "L'Engagement Téméraire," and which had been acted by Madame d'Epinay and her friends at her country house.

This was not the first appearance which the still obscure Rousseau had made in Parisian society. Whilst he was devoting his whole attention to music, he was seen for a while in the salons of Madame de la Popelinière, to whom he submitted his opera of the "Muses Galantes." Madame de la Popelinière was then wholly in favour of the composer Rameau.

She took little heed of the awkward and independent Genevese, but criticised the "Muses Galantes" very bitterly, and gave their author several tokens of her ill-will. Rousseau was as unsuccessful in other quarters, until his essay on "Civilisation" revealed his genius to the world: henceforth he was universally courted and admired; but by remaining so long beyond the pale of what was called elegant society, he had learned to know and despise its judgments: he too might have exclaimed—

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me."

The destiny of Rousseau seemed to mark him out for the apostle of democracy. Exposed as a plebeian to all the proud man's contumely; humbled and oppressed when he mingled with the world; scorned and forgotten when he retired to solitude, the proud and irritable genius garnered up in his heart, through years of unheeded sufferings, that unconquerable hatred of society which he afterwards expressed with an eloquence so bitter and so deep. When in the noonday of his fame he was called forth from his obscurity, he looked upon the world, which had so long excluded him from its precincts, with mingled disdain and abhorrence; and, turning away, he resumed once more that deep and incessant self-communion, the bliss and misery of his whole life. Rousseau was not immaculate; but at least he felt in his soul a thirst for an ideal excellence of which he met no trace elsewhere. He fell into the common error of mistaking his aspirations for virtues. He has been called vain, and there are strange traces of self-idolatry throughout the whole of his erring life: but was it himself that Rousseau worshipped, or the good he believed he saw in his own heart? If he was selfish and vain, he was not exclusively such; else, whence came the passion and fervour of his doctrines, the magic eloquence and tenderness of his style, which could rouse even the whole mass of a corrupt and decaying society? When did a heart, unmoved itself, stir others so deeply?

It was natural that Rousseau should not sympathise with

the philosophers. They only aimed at destruction; he wished to destroy in order to create anew: their inspirations were all derived from the external and social world, which they obeyed; his were essentially internal and independent. Thus, whilst Voltaire owed his fame to the pliancy with which he yielded to the feelings of the age, Rousseau won his by the vehemence with which he attacked those feelings. Society avenged itself personally upon him, even whilst it admired and exalted his genius; but it had not sufficient faith in its own vitality to feel injured. All knew that a great social change was at hand, and hailed the prophetic voice by which it was announced.

Rousseau had not yet wholly broken with the world when he contracted for Madame d'Epinay a friendship, which, though very ardent at first, was as unfortunate as his other attachments. It is well known that Rousseau's unhappy temper would never let him agree long with his friends of either sex. He passionately loved the society of women—it was to his intercourse with them that Diderot partly ascribed the grace and fervour of his style—but he did little to conciliate their favour; though he knew, from the first, "that nothing could he done in Paris without the aid of women." He absolutely refused to submit to the patronising tone they were in the habit of using towards the philosophers: nor were his quarrels with his fair friends marked by much amenity of tone or feeling on his part. His connexion with Madame d'Epinay was particularly unfortunate. The passionate love he expressed for nature and solitude induced Madame d'Epinay, in the first enthusiasm of her friendship, to fit him up a romantic little hermitage at Montmorency, and in the neighbourhood of her own residence. Rousseau was extremely unhappy in this retreat; he complained that his friends deserted him, and accused Grimm of seeking to deprive him of the friendship of Diderot, D'Holbach, and Madame d'Epinay. To add to his misfortunes, he fell desperately in love with Madame d'Houdetot, Madame d'Epinay's sister-in-law, and the mistress of Saint-Lambert; whom his adventure

with Madame du Chatelet had brought into notice in Parisian society. Rousseau was then composing his "Nouvelle Héloïse," and he read the letters, as he finished them, to Madame d'Epinay and Madame d'Houdetot. Though this latter lady was, as Rousseau avers, the only woman he ever loved, she could boast of little beauty: she squinted, and was marked with the small-pox. But she was gay, frank, and thoughtless, and, according to all accounts, witty and very charming: her friends called her the "parfaite Julie." Rousseau's love was hopeless; for Madame d'Houdetot was ardently attached to Saint-Lambert, to whom she always remained constant. Her husband, as usual, raised no obstacle to her passion: he and Saint-Lambert agreed very well until their old age, when they became extremely jealous of one another, and led Madame d'Houdetot a very uneasy life.

Rousseau was soon thoroughly miserable in his hermitage: he accused Diderot of deserting him, and Madame d'Epinay of being in a league with his enemies. After vainly attempting to sow division between Madame d'Houdetot and Saint-Lambert, he ended by turning on Madame d'Epinay with a singular degree of acrimony. They parted with mutual feelings of ill-will; and this disagreement was the origin of Rousseau's long quarrel with the whole philosophic party. For some time, Paris talked of nothing else. Rousseau's discussions with Diderot were especially the theme of conversation. "This is really incredible," exclaimed M. de Castries: "one can hear of nothing but those people who have no position, no house of their own, and who actually live in garrets." In spite of D'Holbach's warning, Hume took Rousseau's part, and brought him to England. Rousseau, more gloomy and misanthropic than ever, soon accused his host of conspiring against his peace and honour, and indulged in such bitter personalities, that Hume, exasperated, wrote off to D'Holbach—"You were right: Rousseau is a monster." This letter was publicly read by D'Holbach, and brought down much opprobrium on Rousseau. Walpole, who was then in Paris, thought this a fit opportunity to address to

Rousseau a very impertinent and insulting letter, in which he assumed the name of Frederick of Prussia. Madame du Deffand was asserted to have revised this letter for her friend. Rousseau resented this very much. One of his most bitter complaints against Hume and Walpole was, that they had drawn all the women away from him; and this circumstance, which was correct in the main, contributed no little to the social persecutions Rousseau henceforth endured.

After his quarrel with Madame d'Epinay, Rousseau appears indeed to have broken entirely with the Parisian world, and the ladies who ruled over it. Madame d'Epinay, who was wholly influenced by Grimm, and whom Rousseau's caprices had heartily wearied, did not regret the loss of her former friend: it is, however, to her connexion with him that she owed the interest attached to her name, and the attention she excited in her own times.

When Rousseau had left the hermitage, and when his quarrel with her was no longer thought of, Madame d'Epinay found herself comparatively forgotten. In her latter days, she wrote works on education, and became the rival of Madame de Genlis; but her talent always remained essentially commonplace.

Rousseau speaks of her with singular bitterness, and evidently with injustice. She was kind-hearted, and would have remained his friend, had he allowed her to do so. But to agree with any one was not his destiny, or rather, in his nature; he accused Madame d'Epinay of being in a league against him with the philosophers, and left her in order to brood over his imaginary wrongs: "a lonely man; his life a long soliloquy!"*

* Carlyle.

CHAPTER V.

GENERAL ASPECT OF SOCIETY—POWER OF WOMAN—MADAME DU DEFFAND.

We have already stated that the society of Madame d'Epinay was secondary in importance to the bureaux d'esprit so celebrated in the history of the eighteenth century. Three of those assemblies—and the three most important—were then presided over by Madame du Deffand, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and Madame Geoffrin. The first of these ladies was celebrated for her caustic wit; Mademoiselle de Lespinasse for the charms of her conversation; and Madame Geoffrin for her active benevolence.

The existence of these literary societies is a characteristic feature of the times. Montesquieu, covertly alluding to their influence, satirically observes, that a nation where women give the prevailing tone must necessarily be talkative. Then, however, it was the men who talked, and the women who listened. The men talked because they could do little else; women gave the prevailing tone, because men of all classes were partly compelled, and partly willing, to gather around them. The nobles being excluded from politics—in which none but the ministers and their creatures could interfere—exercising no control, either as individuals or as a body, naturally gave themselves up to the pleasures of society. Their political insignificance thus increased the power and importance of women.

The society of women was also sought by authors and scientific men, because there was no other freedom than the social freedom protected by them. Those opinions which, if published openly, would have drawn down persecution on

those men by whom they were asserted, could be professed without fear in a drawing-room. The individuals who, nevertheless, ventured on the publication of these principles, were not the less anxious for this to appear in the bureaux d'esprit. They were animated by that stirring and communicative impulse which characterises epochs of intellectual action. Though the philosophers overrated the value of their labours—since they destroyed where it was their duty to investigate, and, the department of science excepted, left nothing save ruins behind them—a great change was, nevertheless, effected in their own opinions, and in those of their contemporaries. They all cast away the old creeds and institutions of society. Such workings do not pass silently in the human mind: whether they lead to good or to evil, the first irresistible impulse of man is to impart them to other human beings.

To this powerful motive for courting female society may be added the consciousness that the women who then presided over literary circles not only named whom they liked to the Academy, but dispensed as they chose influence and reputation. Thomas, the author, suffered in his fame for not having known how to conciliate the women of his time. The indolence of the upper classes, the general want of freedom, and the vanity and ambition of authors, thus laid the basis of the power of women—a power then carried to an extent now scarcely suspected.

It is both ludicrous and contemptible to read, in contemporary memoirs, of the arts then employed to secure the favour of those despotic rulers of society. Even men of high rank, like the Prince of Condé, felt convinced that nothing could be effected without the assistance of women; and, acknowledging only one method of securing this assistance, professed themselves the admirers of every handsome and clever woman who seemed likely to further their views. Those whose personal disadvantages did not allow them to act this part, were satisfied with the more humble rank of confidential friend. Almost every woman of fashion had in her train one of these confidants, who listened to the history

of her love affairs, kindly supposed them to be purely platonic, and whose task it was to administer consolation and advice. During the seventeenth century, weak-minded women were notorious for their partiality towards their religious directors. But, "autre temps, autre mœurs," and the descendants of the devotees of Louis XIV. now gave the empire, formerly usurped under the name of religion, to a very different feeling. Most of these singular *directeurs* owed their success in life to the zeal of their female friends: a fact which served to increase the species.

This political insignificance of the men placing the women on a level with them, also rendered the intercourse of the two sexes more polished and agreeable. They could speak on the same subjects, since there were no political discussions from which the women were to be excluded. Conversation was soon carried to the height of an art, though it was ever marked by the most elegant simplicity. It not only acquired a style, but also became remarkable for its perspicuity and concision. The necessity under which men laboured of explaining to the women with whom they conversed matters their ignorance prevented them from understanding, made them acquire a clearness and facility they often transferred to their writings. That excessive polish, which is both the beauty and the defect of the French language, is to be attributed to female influence. Women necessarily perfect the taste of a nation, and the wish of pleasing them introduces refinement and elegance. The assemblies over which they then presided were not free, however, from great disadvantages. One of their most serious evils was, that for the calm meditation of former writers they substituted the habit of quick and light decisions peculiar to conversation. Mingled presumption and frivolousness thus became one of the characteristics of the times.

It would be erroneous to conclude, from what has been said of the general profligacy which then prevailed, that the conversation of men and women who owned few moral restraints, was marked by indelicacy. Never, on the contrary, was con-

versation more free from this blemish, and even from scandal. One of the female oracles of those days had pronounced, "que cela gâtait le ton d'une femme," and she was in the right: scandal is essentially vulgar. Thus, the careless remark that M. *Un Tel* "had" Madame *Une Telle* was the only knowledge a stranger could obtain of an illicit connexion between persons who were notoriously on the most intimate terms. The least open freedom on the part of those persons would have excluded them for ever from society. Sin was tolerated, but the indecencies of sin were rigidly forbidden.

It is difficult to imagine that a society more polite, elegant, and intellectual than that of the eighteenth century should ever have existed; and this for the obvious reason that universal attention was directed towards the acquisition of those talents necessary to appear to advantage in society, as well as to render it more perfect and attractive. Many men and women of high talents sought not to establish their fame on anything like a durable basis: the great business of life was then to talk well, with grace, wit, and vivacity; everything else was sacrificed to the possession of this perishable accomplishment. Thus, the remarkable women of those times are now known only by hearsay; they left nothing by which they can be judged fairly: their productions, when they did write, do not come up to the idea formed of their talents. Having early sought to shine chiefly in conversation, they were no longer fitted for that peculiar train of thought necessary to literary composition. It is by their letters alone that we can now conceive the real tone of their minds. But for the correspondence of Madame du Deffand, what idea could we have of her keen and polished satire, and of that selfishness and ennui which literally consumed her existence? Were it not for the love-letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, first given to the public through the indiscretion of a friend, it would be impossible to understand correctly the originality and passionate fervour which distinguished this unhappy woman.

It is also a remarkable and interesting fact, that the

authoresses of those times were very commonplace women, with little influence. Madame de Genlis had great talent, and a wonderful industry; but she cannot, however, be said to have risen higher than this. Madame de Staël, who had genius, does not belong to the brilliant portion of the eighteenth century. She appeared when the spirit of the Revolution was already effacing the last vestiges of that selfish and corrupt society.

To judge of the intellect and influence of the women of those times, we must therefore consider them in their social relations, and often in their private affections. To judge of them otherwise would be to fall into inevitable errors. The personal characters of the three ladies whom we have mentioned as holding the bureaux d'esprit frequented by the whole philosophic tribe, will, even without straining after imaginary analogies, represent a few of the very distinct feelings which then divided French society. The polite, profligate, and sceptical noblesse naturally gathered around Madame du Deffand, a witty and aristocratic woman; Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, a social outcast by her illegitimate birth, and gifted with an ardent and enthusiastic mind, sympathised with the political reformers of the day; the worldly-wise and moderate ones of the philosophic party met at the house of Madame Geoffrin, the quiet and prudent bourgeoise, who wished to reconcile her religious feelings with the patronage of professed sceptics. The society of Madame du Deffand is the first that must occupy our attention.

Frank without candour, and impetuous without either passions or feeling; full of wit and sound judgment in her mode of thinking, but extravagant and often ridiculous in her conduct; openly selfish, and yet capable of friendship: such was Madame du Deffand. During her youth she was known for her beauty, vivacity, and equivocal conduct. As age drew on, her charms vanished, and she became blind, ill-tempered, and ennuyée. She sought for a time a refuge in devotion, but having naturally little turn that way, she opened a bureau d'esprit to the philosophers. Neither their society

nor her own wit—which, after that of Voltaire and Piron, was perhaps the keenest of the age—could preserve her, however, from the incessant ennui that consumed her declining years.

Marie Vichy de Chamrond was born towards the close of the seventeenth century. In the convent where she was brought up, and where she received an excellent education, she early distinguished herself for a tone of raillery on religious matters, which alarmed the nuns. They called in Massillon to talk to her; but the good and amiable bishop was too much delighted with the grace and frankness of the young girl to be very severe. "Elle est charmante!" was his only reproof. At the age of twenty-two, Mademoiselle de Vichy was married to the Marquis du Deffand, from whom her intrigues soon caused her to separate. Eyes remarkable for their beauty and brilliancy, a pleasant smile, and a countenance full of piquancy and expression, were the chief personal attractions of the witty young marchioness. Amongst her numerous lovers were the regent, whom she fascinated for a whole fortnight; a M. de Formont, much esteemed by Voltaire; President Henault, and Pont de Veyle, the adopted brother of Mademoiselle Aïssé. The latter two remained constant to her until their dotage, and were supposed to stand equally well in her favour. Constancy in love was not one of Madame du Deffand's virtues.

Finding herself heart-free at one epoch of her life, she resolved to effect a reconciliation with her husband. She spared no seductions to win him back, but she had no sooner effected her object than the return of a lover by whom she had been abandoned made her repent her success. Not knowing how to get rid of M. du Deffand, she assumed so melancholy and woe-begone an aspect whenever he was present, that the poor man was glad to leave her once more. Her lover, who had persuaded her to act this part merely out of pique, now left her in his turn; and, as the details of the adventure were known over all Paris on the following day, the fickle Madame du Deffand became the scorn of the whole

town: blamed and forsaken by her most intimate friends, and obliged to associate with such women as Madame de Brie and Madame de Parabère.

After the failure of the Cellamare conspiracy, Madame du Deffand was restored to something like consideration by the friendship of Madame du Maine, who fully appreciated her keen lively wit. It was probably at the polished court of this princess, and in the intimacy of Madame de Staal, that Madame du Deffand acquired the exquisite style which afterwards characterised her writings. She was also indebted for this accomplishment to her own great care in writing. During the earlier portion of her life, she never sent a letter without having first written it three or four times over: another fact which proves how erroneous is the impression that the epistolary remains of those times were spontaneous effusions.

With both Madame du Maine and Madame de Staal, Madame du Deffand was a great favourite, as we can see from the lively amd amusing letters addressed to her by the companion of the duchess. Her degree of favour was, however, as variable as the temper of the capricious princess, according to the testimony of Madame de Staal, who thus writes to her friend:—"I read your letter before yesterday to her highness. She was in a fit of fear produced by the thunder. This did not tend to set off the polite things you said. I shall take care another time not to expose you to stormy weather. We were joyful for the last few days; now the rain is come again. Our ideas, which had become serene and pleasant, will resume all their gloom. Add to this, that for two days our princess has had a cold, accompanied with fever; notwithstanding which, and the abominable weather, the ceaseless promenade is not discontinued. Verily Providence seems to provide princes with bodies suited to all their fancies; they could never otherwise reach the age of reason."

The restlessness which induced Madame du Maine to pursue her out-door pleasures with as much zeal as if wind and rain did not exist, led her to surround herself by all the visitors she could procure: quantity far more than quality seems to

have been her object. She had made Madame du Deffand promise that she would spend some time at Sceaux, where an apartment was kept for her. But then Madame du Deffand was notoriously inconstant: if she broke her word, the apartment remained vacant, and a visitor—no matter whom—was irreparably lost to Madame du Maine. Madame de Staal, who had learned to read her princely mistress thoroughly, intimated as much to Madame du Deffand.

"The desire of being surrounded increases daily. I foresee that if you keep an apartment without occupying it there will be great regret for the loss you will cause, no matter what that loss may be. The great become so transparent that we can see the light through. It is an admirable study to contemplate them: I know nothing that brings us back more surely to philosophy."

The daughter of the regent, Mademoiselle de Valois, formerly mistress of Richelieu, now Duchess of Modena, came to Paris about this time. Madame du Deffand, who had known her in her youth, paid her a visit. On learning this, Madame du Maine, who would probably not have shed a tear at Madame du Deffand's death, manifested the greatest vexation and grief.

"Nothing," wrote Madame de Staal, "can equal the surprise and sorrow experienced on learning that you had been to see the Duchess of Modena. An impassioned and jealous lover bears the most suspicious steps more patiently than this was endured from you. You are going to devote yourself there, to abandon all else. One was then reserved to this fate, to be the example of every misery; the torments that seemed gone are going to be renewed through you; it is a most cruel destiny, &c. I said all that could be said to restore something like calmness, but I was not heeded. Although I have no right to be astonished at anything, this scene nevertheless found means to surprise me. Come, I conjure you, and reassure us against this alarm."

It was principally after the death of Madame de Staal and of Madame du Maine, that Madame du Deffand, who had

hitherto spent the greatest portion of her time at Sceaux, began to receive a few friends in her apartment in the convent of Saint Joseph, and gradually gathered around her a brilliant literary circle, which took its tone from her own sceptical and sarcastic spirit. But even before this epoch, Montesquieu, D'Alembert, Marmontel, the Maréchale de Luxembourg, Madame de Staal, the Duchess de la Vallière, Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet, the Chevalier D'Aydie, Pont de Veyle, Formont, and the President Henault, composed her habitual society. We have already stated that, before she assumed the tone of a femme philosophe, Madame du Deffand had several times endeavoured to become a devotee; but faith seemed antipathetic to her nature. Though she was very zealous in her first attempt at reformation, she did not scruple to declare, "that she should not honour *rouge* and President Henault—her lover *en titre*—so far as to discard them." The poor President, who feared her temper more than he loved her person, was very cavalierly treated by the capricious Madame du Deffand. Having ventured, in one of the letters he addressed to her during a temporary separation, to express a sentimental regret at her absence, she answered him in a tone of cool and cutting sarcasm, which effectually silenced such outpourings of his heart for the future. If Madame du Deffand was selfish and heartless, she had, at least, the merit of being perfectly frank about it. When the celebrated work of Helvetius appeared, several persons blamed him in her presence for having made selfishness the great motive of human actions. "Bah!" said she, "he has only revealed every one's secret."

Her failure as a devotee did not prevent Madame du Deffand from establishing herself in the convent of Saint Joseph, where she had a handsome apartment, and gave evening parties and suppers to her friends. She had not long been settled there, when she became totally blind; and she remained in this melancholy condition for the last thirty years of her life. Madame du Deffand bore her calamity with great fortitude, but it naturally added to the deep ennui which consumed her existence; and which, with her habitual frankness, she never

sought to disguise. "Give me a secret to ward off ennui," she observes, in one of her letters to D'Alembert, "and you will lay me under a greater obligation than if you had bestowed on me the philosopher's stone." This feeling was by no means peculiar to Madame du Deffand: the published correspondence of the circle over which she presided shews that, with all their wit and boasted philosophy, her friends found the burden of life intolerably heavy.

The ennui of Madame du Deffand was increased by a singular degree of heartlessness. She had intellectual predilections, but she could not love. The gaiety and vivacity of D'Alembert were acceptable to her; so were the originality and naïveté of Montesquieu, the polished wit of President Henault, or the satire of Voltaire; but she had little affection for them as individuals. This did not prevent her from being in many cases a sincere and zealous friend: though friendship was, with her, divested of all its charms. Of her deficiency in this respect, Madame du Deffand was well aware: when in the latter years of her life she became acquainted with Madame de Genlis, who was then bringing up, with her own children and those of the Duke of Orleans, a young English girl, named Pamela, (afterwards the wife of the unhappy Lord Fitzgerald,) she asked her, with evident surprise, "Are you so fond of that child?" "I am very fond of her indeed!" was the natural reply. "Ah! you are very happy," sighed Madame du Deffand; "I never could love anything." According, indeed, to the testimony of one who knew her well, "it was difficult to have less feeling and more selfishness."

Those persons who compared Madame du Deffand to Madame de Sévigné—and there were many who did so in her own circle—overlooked this trait in her character. Her wit was very brilliant, and her style no doubt was very pure; but was the great charm of Madame de Sévigné merely wit or style? Does not that charm consist rather in the admirable pathos and infinite variety with which she paints her deep and passionate attachment for her beloved daughter? Madame de

Sévigné had the keenest enjoyment of life, as is shewn by the very vehemence with which she deplores every trifling sorrow; the life of Madame du Deffand was one of tasteless ennui. If we except a few satirical sketches, admirably drawn, what is there in all her letters, that should make them be compared with those of Madame de Sévigné? This total insensibility not being accompanied by the affectation of a contrary feeling, did not prevent the society of Madame du Deffand from being eminently attractive. It was, indeed, impossible to resist the fascination of that brilliant, active intellect, which yielded to every impression, and passed from one subject to another, with ever new freshness and variety. In all matters connected with the everyday world—the only world the eighteenth century cared for—Madame du Deffand was inimitable. The soundness of her judgment, united to the poignancy and originality of her language, and that causticity which never forsook her, caused her society to be eagerly sought for and highly valued. Her freedom from the wish of seeking for effect, and her striking impartiality, were also very remarkable characteristics of Madame du Deffand's mind. At an epoch when simplicity was by no means prevalent, she displayed an unbending hatred of everything like subtlety and finesse, and unsparingly accused of affectation all the thinkers of the day. She had no more sympathy with the declamatory enthusiasm of the philosophers than with the rigorism of the devotees. She disbelieved in the existence of feelings she could never experience herself.

This general indifference prevented Madame du Deffand from surrounding herself exclusively with philosophers; consequently the society which met at her house was far more easy and polite, and more free from vanity and pedantry than it was customary for such assemblies to be.

It was probably this absence of all effort and restraint which made the frank and unaffected Montesquieu—who loved those houses where, to use his own expression, he could pass with his everyday wit—regret with so much sincerity the delightful suppers of the Convent of Saint Joseph. The

peculiar pleasure which he found in the society of his hostess he thus candidly expressed to the Chevalier d'Aydie, "I love this woman with all my heart; she pleases and amuses me: it is impossible to feel a moment's ennui in her company."

The feelings with which Madame du Deffand inspired her friends corresponded to the degree of pleasure she afforded them. But whilst she imparted amusement to others, she could not always receive it herself; and at those suppers, where all the strangers who visited Paris eagerly sought to be admitted, the listless countenance of the hostess often betrayed the ennui which pursued her even there. She did not even choose to disguise that ennui from those who unfortunately added to it. One of her friends, remarkable for the monotony of his delivery, was boring her one day with a long and uninteresting dissertation. "My dear friend," said she, taking advantage of her blindness to feign ignorance, "what tiresome book are you reading?" There was nothing, however, which Madame du Deffand dreaded so much as solitude, and in general she spared no effort to render her house attractive to her visitors. "Let us have good cheer," she often said to her cook, "I now want society more than ever." "Suppers," she also observed, "were one of the four great objects of man in life." Madame du Deffand did well, with all her wit, not to rely too exclusively on its effects. Abstemiousness was neither her virtue nor that of the sensual philosophers with whom she associated.

The society of Madame du Deffand's was neither literary, like Madame de Tencin's, nor artistic, like that of Madame de la Popelinière. It was the society of aristocratic and intellectual individuals, who met for common amusement, with a sprinkling of philosophers, in order to give some variety to conversation, and also because philosophy was the fashion of the day. The most ardent members of the philosophic sect had, however, little sympathy with the cold-hearted Madame du Deffand. She said herself, in her own quiet way, "Je n'ai pas d'atomes aurochans." Diderot came once to visit her, eyed her witty Epicurean friends with contempt, and never

came again. Freedom and good breeding were the chief characteristics of this circle. Within its narrow limits, however, Madame du Deffand set up for an arbitrary judge on all questions of philosophy or taste. Her correspondence with Voltaire, and the high value he set on her opinions, gave her great authority: though her decisions were marked by more wit than correctness. Of Montesquieu's great work, she observed that it was not L'Esprit des Lois, but De l'Esprit sur les Lois,—a saying which Voltaire thought sufficiently good to make his own and repeat. There was more truth in her remark already quoted on the work of Helvetius; for though it is false that selfishness is the only human incentive, the assertion was often correct with respect to the good society of that period.

Notwithstanding her intercourse with the philosophers, Madame du Deffand was too egotistical and ennuyée to favour the spirit of discussion by which they were animated. She was a sceptic chiefly because the trouble of inquiry was insupportable to her; and also because a sceptical indifference was natural to her mind: "Qu'elle aimait laisser flotter dans le vague," as she herself observed. Madame du Deffand was, moreover, of opinion that what cannot be known to us is evidently unnecessary: a remark which Voltaire pronounced admirable. "This is a great truth, madame; and what is better still, a very consoling one." However logical Madame du Deffand's reasoning may have been, its immediate tendency was to render her indifferent to all that did not concern her nearly. Willing as she was to enjoy the most entire freedom in her little philosophic parties, she strongly objected that her friends should betray her by exercising the same liberty publicly, and reproached them for the bitterness with which they assailed the existing order of things. It was characteristic of her selfish and indifferent temper to look exclusively to her own quietness, and, still more, to consider philosophy as an art which a few amateurs exercised for private amusement, and which was to lead to no further result.

When Horace Walpole first visited Madame du Deffand, and

began his celebrated connexion with her, he found her surrounded by the élite of the Parisian world of intellect and fashion. D'Alembert, indeed, had deserted his old friend for reasons which shall be specified hereafter, and Madame du Deffand sadly missed his mirth and boyish spirits; but she still enjoyed the company of many choice acquaintances, who amused her as much as she could be amused, whilst she languidly reclined in her arm-chair, making knots, the only occupation in which her blindness permitted her to engage. Pont de Veyle, grave and morose, but inimitable in parody, was there; so were the old and amiable Maréchale de Luxembourg; the flattering Madame de Mirepoix; the graceful and charming Duchess of Choiseul: her husband the minister,—"that little volatile being who gave but three seconds to any one body or thing," * and who preferred to his amiable wife his own sister, the clever, ambitious, haughty Duchess of Grammont—"a fierce Amazonian dame, who loved and hated arbitrarily, was universally detested," and whose memorable struggle with Madame du Barry worked the ruin of her brother.

The gossiping Englishman, as ennuyé as any of Madame du Deffand's guests, began by ridiculing this society, ungallantly terming the hostess "an old debauchée of wit;" but he gradually yielded to the universal fascination, and after confessing that "there was a *douceur* in the society of the women of fashion that captivated him," he wrote home the following lively account of the "old, blind, charming Madame du Deffand:"—"She is now very old, and stone blind; but retains all her vivacity, wit, memory, judgment, passions, and agreeableness. She goes to operas, plays, suppers, and Versailles; gives suppers twice a-week; has every new work read to her; makes new songs and epigrams, ay, admirably, and remembers every one that has been made these fourscore years. She corresponds with Voltaire, dictates charming letters to him, contradicts him, is no bigot to him or to anybody, and laughs both at the clergy and the philosophers."

* Walpole's Letters.

As she grew older, Madame du Deffand's insensibility of feeling seemed to increase. Her conduct towards Pont de Veyle was heartless to the last degree. The authenticity of the dialogue,* said by Grimm to have passed between the two aged lovers, may be doubted; but her conduct towards him in his last illness is a matter of fact. On the evening of Pont de Veyle's death, she came to a large supper given by Madame de Marchais. As his demise was already known, the persons present condoled with her on the subject. "Alas!" was her feeling reply, "he died this evening at six o'clock; otherwise you would not see me here." And she supped with her usual appetite. This heartlessness might proceed from caprice, for whilst Madame du Deffand shewed so much indifference to the fate of poor Pont de Veyle, she was carrying on her correspondence with Walpole; for whom she had conceived a sort of passionate friendship, and who, when he visited Paris, ruled arbitrarily over her little circle: thus dispossessing President Henault of his ancient privileges.

This coterie of Madame du Deffand's may be considered as the best illustration of French society in the eighteenth century. Unlike the other philosophic circles, it had no purpose more definite than a resource against ennui. Ministers, titled ladies, philosophers, and foreigners, met on this neutral ground; they cared little for one another, but they were witty, well bred, and could afford and receive amusement by meeting together. This society was justly admired for the accomplishments of its members, who contributed to spread around them their own polished and unaffected manners. But this was the only influence they exercised. Madame du Def-

* "'Pont de Veyle!' 'Madame!' 'Où êtes vous?' 'Au coin de votre cheminée.' 'Couché les pieds sur les chenets, comme on est chez ses amis?' Oui, madame.' 'Il faut convenir qu'il est peu de liaisons aussi anciennes que la nôtre.' 'Cela est vrai.' 'Il y a cinquante ans.' 'Oui, cinquante ans passés.' 'Et dans ce long intervalle aucun nuage, pas même l'apparence d'une brouillerie.' 'C'est ce que j'ai toujours admiré.' 'Mais, Pont de Veyle, cela ne viendrait-il point de ce qu'au fond nous avons toujours été fort indifférens l'un à l'autre?' 'Cela se pourrait bien, madame.'"

fand had no aim, and she effected nothing. She succeeded, however, in making her house the resort of all the distinguished foreigners who visited France. When the reforming and philosophic sovereign Joseph II., the brother of Marie Antoinette, came to Paris in 1777, he visited Madame du Deffand, whom he found making knots. "This occupation," observed the emperor, "does not prevent you from thinking." "And especially now that you give every one so much cause to think," was Madame du Deffand's prompt and flattering reply.

The keen wit and agreeable conversation of Madame du Deffand were also valued by her countrymen; but the influence she exercised over them was trifling. It requires faith in one's own opinions in order to impart them to others; this Madame du Deffand had not: she may even be said to have survived her own power. The most brilliant period of her circle was during the sway of Choiseul, when the friendship of the powerful minister contributed to her influence. It gradually declined under the reign of Louis XVI.: her wit, by assuming the tone of rancour and malice, had then lost many of its attractions. The times were altered, moreover: the philosophic power had progressed, and no longer sought the patronage of narrow circles; it had become the spirit of the whole nation. The ill-temper and ennui of Madame du Deffand increased on beholding herself neglected. She again attempted to become devout, but complained that she could not understand the epistles of St Paul. She took for her confessor the celebrated Père l'Enfant, who perished in the massacre of September, and only kept him six months. After spending thus several years in alternatives of ennui and devotion, she beheld herself at the point of death in the month of September of the year 1780. She sent for the curé of Saint Sulpice, and addressed him thus:—"M. le Curé, you will be satisfied with me; but spare me three things: let me have no questions, no reasons, and no sermons."

Madame du Deffand was attended in her last illness by her old friends, Mesdames de Luxembourg, de Choiseul, and de

Cambise, who played loto near her bedside every evening; and who, it is said, continued this interesting amusement almost to the moment of her death. The nature of the friendship which then united people of the world renders this fact sufficiently probable.

Thus passed from life, in her eighty-fourth year, Madame du Deffand; a clever, selfish woman, fit emblem of the aristocratic society which was, like her, going to disappear, and to be ere long "among the things that were."

CHAPTER VI.

MADEMOISELLE DE LESPINASSE.

Amongst the persons who composed the circle of Madame du Deffand was a young girl named Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, to whom we have as yet only alluded, because she appeared in that society but for a short time, and held an essentially subordinate position amongst the titled individuals of whom it chiefly consisted.

Fiction has seldom brought in contact two beings of natures so dissimilar as when reality caused Mademoiselle de Lespinasse and Madame du Deffand to meet. The blindness, and other infirmities, of Madame du Deffand rendered it necessary for her to have a companion; she took Mademoiselle de Lespinasse for this purpose: the young girl's history was brief and melancholy. She had, in reality, no claim to the name she bore, being the illegitimate daughter of Madame d'Albon, a married lady of high rank. She was brought up in a convent, under the name of Lespinasse; and when she was of age, was placed as a governess in the family of her mother. As Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was acquainted with the secret of her birth, it was doubly painful to her to see herself treated as a poor dependent by the rich and noble family to which she belonged. The affection which Madame d'Albon could only shew her in secret, supported her for some time under her trials; but her mother died, and the proofs of her birth, which she had bequeathed to her, were, as well as a large sum of money, basely wrested from Julie de Lespinasse by her relatives. Her position, being now no longer alleviated by the kindness and love of Madame d'Albon, became singularly painful and humiliating. It was then that she met Madame

du Deffand, and readily accepted her proposal of residing with her as "demoiselle de compagnie."

The cold and selfish Madame du Deffand treated her young dependent with little kindness. She made her sleep, like her, during the day-time, and sit up all night, in order to read aloud to her. This unnatural mode of life completely destroyed the health of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. The only real consolation she found in this melancholy position was the friendship of D'Alembert, the friend of Madame du Deffand; and, as we have already mentioned, the illegitimate son of Madame de Tencin. Even without any regard to the personal merits of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, the warm-hearted D'Alembert could not but feel deep sympathy for the friendless girl,—like him, the unacknowledged offspring of guilty love. The subdued gentleness with which she bore the caprices of her despotic mistress moved him more deeply still. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, touched with the interest he felt in her fate, returned his proffered friendship with all the ardour and enthusiasm of her nature. The loneliness and suffering which embittered her early youth seemed to have added only new intensity to the natural fervour of her feelings. Besides the friendship of D'Alembert, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse also derived exquisite gratification from the intercourse of the select company which met at the house of Madame du Deffand. Few women were, indeed, so admirably adapted as she was for intellectual pleasures: she revelled in them, with a keenness and vivacity wholly unknown to her unimpassioned mistress. This instantaneous impression, made on her mind by whatever was excellent, rendered the society of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse extremely seducing for men of talent. She pleased—not merely by her own personal attractions, great as they were, but still more by the evident delight she received from the wit and eloquence of those to whom she listened. This singular vividness and delicacy of perception seemed to be communicative; and seldom was anything good or excellent uttered in the presence of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse without having been generally felt and understood.

The visitors of Madame du Deffand soon discovered the great attractions, both personal and mental—for, before she had the small-pox, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was of a very engaging aspect—of her companion; but, in order not to excite the jealousy of their hostess, they avoided, whilst in her presence, taking too much notice of her young dependant. As they were desirous, however, of enjoying the pleasure of her conversation without restraint, they secretly proceeded to her room about an hour before the usual time of calling on Madame du Deffand, who generally slept until the arrival of her guests. For a long time Madame du Deffand remained unconscious of these circumstances; when she, at length, knew of them, her fury was unbounded. She accused Mademoiselle de Lespinasse of the blackest treachery, and announced her intention of dismissing her immediately. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, seeing herself thrown upon the world without a home or the means of procuring one, was driven to despair. The reproaches of Madame du Deffand acted powerfully on her imagination, and, in a fit of that exaggerated sensitiveness which was to prove so fatal to her peace, she swallowed a dose of laudanum. Timely remedies saved her from the consequences of this rash act; but her health, already much impaired, never recovered the shock thus given to her nerves. To Madame du Deffand's cold and insincere expressions of regret, the young girl merely replied: "Madame, it is too late." No other reproach passed her lips.

As soon as Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was sufficiently recovered, they parted. Their separation agitated the whole Parisian world. Ministers and ambassadors took a share in this, then, important affair. After vainly attempting to effect a reconciliation, which circumstances rendered impossible, the society of Madame du Deffand separated into two hostile parties, who filled the whole town with the bitterness of their recriminations. The partisans of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse accused Madame du Deffand of cruelty and selfishness; whilst her adherents painted Mademoiselle de Lespinasse as a monster of ingratitude. Madame du Deffand was, however, severely

blamed by some of her best and most intimate friends. The Maréchale de Luxembourg furnished the apartment taken by Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and old President Henault offered to marry her—a proposal which she declined. The Duke of Choiseul, owing to the exertions of her friends, procured her a pension on the king's privy purse; and Madame Geoffrin, with her unostentatious benevolence, made her a yearly allowance. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse being thus placed above want, soon gathered around her a choice literary circle. If a new academy had been opened, it would not have caused so deep a sensation in French society. Many of the friends of Madame du Deffand deserted her, in order to join her young rival: she imperiously bade D'Alembert choose between her and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse: he did not hesitate to join the latter. D'Alembert was one of the few individuals who had the power of banishing Madame du Deffand's ennui: his unaffected manners, the calm and dispassionate turn of his mind, and the engaging mirth and frankness which distinguished him, were all extremely agreeable to her: the loss of his society accordingly embittered her still more against her former companion, of whom she always spoke with the strongest animosity. It was she who spread the report of her marriage with D'Alembert—a report she knew to be false, for it was notoriously D'Alembert's resolve never to marry—in order that it might be supposed their connexion was not so innocent and creditable as the world generally thought it to be. D'Alembert greatly resented those attempts of his former friend (whom he now called "an old viper") to injure Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; and indignantly declared, that though Madame du Deffand might have no faith in virtuous women, her opinion on this subject had very little value. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, however, checked the zeal of her friend: she never allowed the name of Madame du Deffand to be mentioned in her presence with disrespect. She seldom spoke of her former protectress herself, but when she did so it was with a respectful and dignified reserve.

Shortly after his rupture with Madame du Deffand, D'Alembert fell dangerously ill of a contagious fever: he then inhabited the narrow and unhealthy lodging of his nurse, Rousseau the glazier's wife, by whom he had been brought up. The doctor ordered his removal to a healthier apartment; and here, reckless of her personal risk, and of the censure she might incur, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse took her post by the bedside of her friend, refusing to leave him until he was out of danger. When he was convalescent, D'Alembert took an apartment in the same house with her, and death alone had the power of separating these tried and devoted friends. Whether it was merely friendship that united them, and not a deeper feeling, is a question that has often, and very uselessly, been debated. The world received their version as the true one, and there is much to confirm it. D'Alembert seems to have entertained a warmer sentiment than mere friendship for Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; but he was too calm to experience a very deep passion, and to one of her ardent nature any other feeling would scarcely have been acceptable. He was, besides, notoriously averse to marriage, whereas Mademoiselle de Lespinasse wished to marry. As friends they might agree; but it is very improbable that they could have done so long, if their connexion had been of a closer nature.

Though consisting chiefly of the same guests who had formerly frequented Madame du Deffand's, the society of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse took a tone very different from that which had distinguished the elegant and worldly visitors of the convent Saint Joseph. Ideas of reform and the doctrines of political economy were then beginning to agitate and divide French society; Mademoiselle de Lespinasse sided with the economists and philosophic reformers. Turgot, the future minister of state; the bitter Morellet who expounded his theories, and whom Voltaire aptly called Mord-les, (bite-them;) Diderot, D'Alembert, Marmontel, Chastellux, and Saint-Lambert, were her constant guests: they made her house the central point whence they disseminated their doctrines in

financial, political, and literary matters. All the foreigners of distinction also visited Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; and it was a subject of some jealousy between her and Madame du Deffand as to which of the two should have most Englishmen. Walpole, taking Madame du Deffand's part, refused to see her rival; Hume contrived to be on good terms with both. It was at the house of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse that all Hume's Parisian friends, as well as their hostess and D'Alembert, concluded that he could not well avoid publishing an account of his discussions with Rousseau, and discuss all the circumstances of that celebrated quarrel. The bureaux d'esprit were also social tribunals, which decided every important question connected with literary matters.

All the accounts left of the society of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, represent it as one of the most agreeable places of Parisian resort. There might be seen every evening the most remarkable individuals of every rank. The church, the state, and the army, were as fairly represented in her drawing-room as philosophy; and when, though this happened rarely, she either went to the country or to the play, all Paris was informed beforehand of the important event. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was perhaps one of the most fascinating women of her day. Many surpassed her in youth and beauty—for she had never been very handsome, and when her society was fully formed she had already passed the golden days of youth —many were as clever, and a greater number still were far more brilliant and witty; but none equalled her in that deep power of seduction—deep and great, because involuntarily exercised—which drew around her the most celebrated men of those times. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse listened more than she spoke; but when she did speak it was admirably: she uttered, however, no witticisms, and none of those artificially clever sayings then so much in vogue; and which often look as though they had been prepared beforehand for the occasions on which they were delivered. Her power was not merely intellectual: it sprang less from the activity of her mind than from the depth and fervour of her feelings. This

very fervour seemed to say that she was not formed for happiness: she was too ardent and excitable for this calm state of mind. Secluded from affection during her unhappy youth, her whole soul, on regaining its freedom, gave itself up, not to ordinary love, but to a bewildering and intoxicating passion never meant for earth. It was this inward fire which, whilst it consumed her frail being, gave her so deep a charm, and imparted to her language a passion and eloquence rarely surpassed.

With respect to the society over which she presided, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had another remarkable and still more necessary talent: it was the infinite tact with which she brought the most opposite characters into contact, and kept them together in perfect harmony. Without imposing any restraint on conversation, she knew how to direct it, and prevent it from ever becoming vapid or insignificant: in that age of women, accomplished in the art of guiding social intercourse, none excelled her in this respect.

It was not, however, the aim of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse to check discussion; which was then the spirit of every meeting. All the new works were reviewed and criticised in the fashionable drawing-rooms, where the acts of the government likewise underwent a free scrutiny: circumstances compelled society to be its own organ. The result of this was, that discussions, through long practice, were carried on with a politeness and courtly ease now unknown in France; in consequence of the political changes which have since then occurred in that country. In a nation absolutely governed, party-spirit never could run high; the Revolution, by rousing the passions of the masses, substituted a more energetic, but less elegant mode of expressing them. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse greatly encouraged this habit of discussing the questions of the day: it imparted to the men who assembled in her house a social power, by means of which they afterwards attained to political eminence. These discussions, at the same time, gave them the dangerous habit of judging and deciding rapidly questions that required the exercise of a calm and dispassionate mind.

It argues greatly in favour of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse's attractions, that the distinguished men who were preparing the approaching change in the fundamental principles of government, gathered around her without any motives to do so beyond her own merits. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had no position in society—no connexions; and, not being sufficiently wealthy to keep open house, she only received between the hours of dinner and supper. Even D'Alembert, who listened to her with child-like docility, was confessedly only a secondary attraction, when compared to his friend. She was the only woman whom Madame Geoffrin admitted at the dinner she gave to literary men once a week, and over which the presence of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse shed a singular charm, whether she listened to the discourse of others, as her own taste and unaffected modesty prompted her to do, or whether she spoke with that flow of pure and eloquent language with which she was gifted.

But with the external graces of a Frenchwoman of the eighteenth century, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had none of the heartlessness which characterised the period: her soul had all the fire and passion of those burning climes where life passes as a feverish dream. Indifference was a feeling unknown to her: she either revelled in enthusiastic bliss, or she was overwhelmed with despair. A calm and even state of mind was insupportable to her; and, fatal as it proved to her peace, it was perhaps this perpetual mobility of feeling and impressions which rendered her presence so deeply attractive.

Amongst the foreigners of distinction who called on this fascinating woman, during their stay in Paris, was the Marquis of Mora, a young Spanish noble of distinguishd talents. He soon conceived a deep passion for Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; this feeling almost resembled idolatry: even the least penetrating among her guests noticed his silent and fervent adoration. The family of M. de Mora heard of his attachment, and fearing lest he should be seduced into a marriage with one so much beneath him in birth and fortune,

they called him back to Spain. Before his departure, the Marquis of Mora declared his passion, and received from Mademoiselle de Lespinasse the assurance that it was returned. M. de Mora remained three years in his native country; his health, which was naturally delicate, became seriously impaired; his parents, however, only waited for his convalescence in order to marry him suitably to his rank. The correspondence between the lovers was incessant during their separation; but the obstacles her passion received embittered the temper of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and the excellent D'Alembert, though still devotedly attached to her, often suffered from her caprices. Such, however, was the sincerity of his affection, that it was he who every morning went to the post-office in order to look for the letters of M. de Mora, which he brought back to Mademoiselle de Lespinasse by the time she wakened. On learning the illness of her lover, she prevailed on D'Alembert to obtain from his friend Lorry, the celebrated doctor, a written declaration that the climate of Spain disagreed with the young noble, and that in order to save his life it would be necessary to let him visit Paris once more. On learning this, the family of M. de Mora no longer refused to accede to his wishes; he was accordingly allowed to set out for France: but the fatigue of the journey was too much for him in his weakened state, and he died at Bordeaux without having seen once more the woman he had so ardently loved.

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was overwhelmed with grief, and from that time she slowly declined. Regret for the death of her lover was thought to be the reason of her failing health; but such was not the case: deep as that grief was, there lay hidden in her heart another sorrow deeper still.

During the absence of M. de Mora, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had met with the Count of Guibert—a man who then ranked high in the opinion of the world, though now comparatively forgotten. His talents were remarkable, without being of the first order; the secret of his great success, especially with women, was the singular charm of his conversation: brilliant,

vigorous, original—not, perhaps, in idea, but in manner—it never seemed to weary. Such was the power of his diction, that, when he read aloud his indifferent tragedy of the "Connétable," he never failed to excite the highest enthusiasm in his audience, who all felt convinced they had heard a masterpiece; it was not until they read for themselves that the charm was dissolved. The character of this clever man was a compound of ambitious and generous feelings: the former, however, greatly predominated.

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse saw him, and the universal fascination which he exercised became, in her ardent soul, a deeper feeling. M. de Mora was not forgotten, but he no longer held the same place in her heart; she idolised his virtues, his generous and noble mind; but she did not love him as she had loved him once. Whilst she thus obeyed a fascination that appears to have been irresistible, her soul was, however, burdened with grief and remorse. Her inconstancy lowered her in her own esteem: she felt herself becoming unworthy of M. de Mora, and that for one whose feelings towards her were scarcely above indifference; and yet, notwithstanding every emotion of pride, shame, and regret, she still blindly loved on, consuming her being in this vain struggle against a hopeless passion. The death of M. de Mora added to her grief, but could not lessen her unhappy love.

M. de Guibert soon perceived the passion he had inspired. He felt nothing for Mademoiselle de Lespinasse beyond mere friendship—if his feelings went so far; but his vanity was flattered to see himself so ardently beloved by an admired and accomplished woman. He spoke and acted as though her feelings were returned. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse blinded herself wilfully: she would not see that M. de Guibert was only yielding to the suggestions of vanity; that he had no real affection for her. For some time the seduction of her manners kept her lover really spell-bound, and under her control. But a passion so ardent as was hers could not always be one of unbroken serenity. On the first stormy ex-

planation, M. de Guibert resumed his freedom. When he said, "We must love no longer!" Mademoiselle de Lespinasse answered with all her remaining strength, "Then I cannot live!" Touched by her despair he endeavoured to soothe her, and partly succeeded; but she soon gave him an opportunity of repeating his assertion of indifference: and thus he kept her for several years, alternately declaring that he shared her feelings, or that he could never love her; every time inflicting a deeper wound, until his marriage with another broke the last hope of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and with it her heart. From that time forward until the epoch of her death, which occurred soon afterwards, she only pined slowly away.

It was whilst Mademoiselle de Lespinasse thus consumed her life in despairing grief—with occasional gleams of hope, whose transient sunshine scarcely enlivened the dreary desert over which she trod alone—that she addressed to M. de Guibert those admirable and impassioned letters, in which she describes the torments of her soul with such painful fidelity, that, notwithstanding the errors of this ill-disciplined being, it is impossible to lay down the book with any other feeling than one of deep and unmingled pity.

The style of this singular correspondence—written whilst Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was sinking under the pressure of woe and disease, and when she was also ennervated by the use of opium, to which her want of rest compelled her to resort—is, nevertheless, full of life, vigour, and eloquence. If these letters have not yet assumed their place amongst the classical works of the eighteenth century, it can only be attributed to the contagious and despairing melancholy that breathes in every page.

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was painfully conscious of her errors: her letters are full of self-reproach; but, though she owed all her misery to the impassioned nature which, according to her own admission, carried every feeling to excess, and made it impossible for her to love moderately, she would not have exchanged her sufferings for the joy of others.

"If I had been calm, reasonable, and cold," she observed in one of her letters to M. de Guibert, "nothing of all this would have happened. I would have spent my life like those women who play with their fans, talking of the judgment of M. Morangiez, or of the entry of the Countess of Provence into Paris. But, I repeat it, I prefer my misery to all which the worldly may call happiness or pleasure. I may die; but better this than to have never lived."

Of the burning eloquence profusely poured forth in her letters, extracts can give no adequate idea, though they may serve to paint the state of her mind. How deep, in its very gentleness, is the reproach conveyed in her answer to a coldly compassionate letter of M. de Guibert. "Pity me, my friend, but do not tell me that you pity me." And how much of the wretchedness which consumed her soul is laid bare in the following letter:—

"Ah! if you were to know what I suffer: how fearfully my heart is torn when I am abandoned to myself; when I am no longer supported by your presence or your memory. Ah! then it is that the remembrance of M. de Mora becomes a feeling so active and so penetrating, that I am filled with horror for life and for my love. I abhor the erring passion which has made me so guilty; which has made me fill with anxiety and fear a heart so tender and wholly devoted to me. . . . . Oh! how much was I loved by that soul so full of fire and energy, which had appreciated and judged everything, and which, indifferent to all else, had abandoned itself to the want and the delight of loving. Thus, my friend, thus was I loved.

"Several years had elapsed, fraught with all the charm and all the woe inseparable from a passion so strong and so deep, when you came to pour poison into my heart, and to lay waste my soul with doubt and remorse. Oh, my God! what did you not make me suffer! You drew me away from my love, and yet I saw that you were not mine: do you understand all the horror of this position? How can one live through so much grief? How can one still find happi-

ness in saying, 'My friend, I love you, and that with so much truth and tenderness, that it is impossible your soul can remain cold whilst listening to me?'"

This style is carried further still in another letter, written at midnight, on the anniversary of M. de Mora's decease. After dwelling on the virtues of her former lover, and on her faithlessness to him at the very epoch of his death, in the most forcible language, she suddenly adds, without any transition: "I am dying with grief: my eyes and my heart are full of tears. Farewell! I should not have loved you." And the contrast of this simple yet deep expression of regret, to the excess of her offence, before so strikingly portrayed, renders her overwhelming remorse only more apparent.

These feelings, preying on a mind so ardent and sensitive, soon reduced Mademoiselle de Lespinasse to the verge of insanity. When she learned the approaching marriage of M. de Guibert she felt herself that it was thus. "I feel it: my life depends on my madness: if I were to become calm, if reason were restored to me, I could not live twenty-four hours longer. Do you know the first want of my soul when it has been violently agitated by pleasure or grief? It is to write to M. de Mora! I reanimate him: I call him back to life. My heart rests on his; my soul is poured forth before him: the warmth, the rapidity of my blood conquer death; for I see him: he lives, he breathes, for me; he hears me: my brain is on fire, I no longer need illusion: truth itself is before me. Yes, you are not more present, more perceptible to my senses, than M. de Mora has been for the last hour. . . . Divine creature! he has forgiven me: he loved me! . . . Ah! how deep a bliss there is in love! Love, the sole principle of all that is beautiful, of all that is good and great in nature."

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had borne the marriage of M. de Guibert with comparative calmness, but it was the natural and inevitable indifference of manner which followed it that she could not bear. Gathering around her all the womanly pride which she had cast away so long, she addressed her former lover thus:—

"I have forbidden myself complaints and reproaches: it seemed to me that it would be base to speak of my misfortune to him who had caused it wilfully. . . . : Without supposing you to feel any great tenderness for me, or much interest in my fate, I thought I might rely on what decency and my misfortune prescribed to you. I waited; and, after a lapse of ten days since your absence, I received from the castle of C—— a note which is a masterpiece of indifference and harshness. It filled me with indignation. I conceived a feeling of horror against you, and soon afterwards against myself. . . . . Your marriage, in allowing me to know your soul, has repulsed and closed mine for ever. Oh, no! do not think that I shall follow your advice, and take my models from the novels of Madame Riccoboni. Oh! how deeply your comparison between my misfortune and that incident in the novel wounded me! How cold and deficient in delicacy, you then appeared to me! and how much above you I thought myself by feeling that I was capable of a passion you could not even understand. . . . . I will not tell you that I wish for your friendship, or that I have any for you: the charm and pleasure of this feeling is the confidence on which it is founded; and you know whether your actions and general conduct were likely to inspire me with any. Farewell!—allow me the impulse of pride and vengeance, which makes me find pleasure in declaring that I forgive you, and that it is no longer in your power to make me know apprehension and grief under any aspect whatsoever."

With this last effort of pride and injured love, the strength of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse deserted her: she wrote no more to M. de Guibert, and died silently: carrying, as she thought, her secret to the grave.

The death of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was an event long felt in French society: she was, however, more regretted by her acquaintances than by her friends. This was natural and just. A soul so absorbed by passion as was hers could no longer be adapted for the calm and gentle offices of friendship. During the latter portion of her life, the society over which

she presided had even become burdensome to her. She was often obliged to leave her drawing-room in an uncontrollable burst of grief, in order to seek some retired spot where she might weep and mourn alone. Notwithstanding the alteration of her behaviour, from which he had suffered more than any one, D'Alembert never ceased to deplore the loss of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. On hearing of her death, Madame du Deffand pettishly exclaimed, "If she had only died fifteen years sooner, I should not have lost D'Alembert!" A touching funeral eulogy, worthy of the heart of her by whom it was uttered.

It was long believed that grief for the death of M. de Mora had carried Mademoiselle de Lespinasse to the grave. The publication of her letters to M. de Guibert first revealed the error and misery of this unhappy woman; whose ardent feelings, unsubdued by judgment, cut her off prematurely from the world where she had suffered so deeply in the course of a brief life.

There is in the strange character and destiny of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse a social meaning that should not be forgotten. She embodied the sufferings of the age in her love sorrows. She was separated from M. de Mora, whom she would, perhaps, have never ceased to love but for that separation; and she lost the love of M. de Guibert because she was not a high-born and noble woman. Like Rousseau, she had aspirations towards democracy; and for being silent and secret, like her grief, those aspirations were not the less deep. The aristocratic world in which she lived, by which she was both slighted and admired, where she might love but was never to be loved in return,—not, at least, by a pure and honourable love,—had grown odious to her. If, like Rousseau, she had not become one of the voices of the age, it was because she was a woman, and that her sorrows were essentially womanly. She shrank from exposing them to public scorn. D'Alembert himself never knew of her love for M. de Guibert until after her death; when he was painfully affected by discovering that it was not only M. de Mora whom she had preferred to him, but that there was also another.

The whole life of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was a real though vain protest against the conventional society from which she had suffered so much. She was silent under her sorrows, not only for the reasons already mentioned, but also because her eloquence, though deep, was less the eloquence of genius than that of a despairing and broken heart. Had she been happy and beloved, her name would now be scarcely known: she would be remembered as one of the accomplished women of her times; but the few literary productions she has left—and they are singularly slight and uninteresting—would have inevitably given a most erroneous opinion of her mind. Her power was not creative, as that of genius always is; but if she could not conceive, she felt deeply, and expressed her feelings with heart-rending truth and bitterness: and yet there is, as we have already said, a deep social meaning in her life. She was one of that vast multitude who, though surrounded and contaminated by the sceptical and corrupting influences of the eighteenth century, had yet in them the germ of a nobler nature, and yearned for a purer and freer air than the heated and artificial atmosphere they breathed. Those aspirations towards excellence marked the last days of Louis XV.'s reign, and the opening of his successor's sway. They foretold the coming revolution, and the existence of a vast discontent which rendered it inevitable.

How many, like Rousseau or Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, were then crushed by those social distinctions which they so deeply despised. How many, like them, by the public or private expression of their feelings, hastened the decay of a hateful tyranny, until it fell overwhelmed, in the universal reprobation. Democracy, however mistaken in the forms it may assume, is but the open expression of the long and unknown sufferings of the multitude. Thus, when great crises are at hand, every token of the times assumes new interest, and there may be found deep significance, even in the hidden sorrows of a lonely woman's heart.

CHAPTER VII.

MADAME GEOFFRIN—INFLUENCE OF THE BUREAUX D'ESPRIT.

ONE of the few women whom Madame de Tencin admitted to her réunions towards the close of her life, was a quiet, middle-aged bourgeoise, unassuming alike in dress and manner, and named Madame Geoffrin. "She comes here to see what she can secure out of my inheritance," Madame de Tencin often observed, with a smile, to her friends. Madame Geoffrin's object was, indeed, to become personally acquainted with the eminent men who met at the house of the ex-nun, in order, whenever her demise should occur, to gather them around herself.

Madame de Tencin was neither annoyed nor disturbed by the knowledge of her visitor's intentions: she received her well, and even gave her some professional advice. The following maxim is characteristic of the donor: "Be complaisant to every man you know: though nine out of ten should not care a whit for you, the tenth may live to prove a useful friend." Without acting exclusively according to this precept, Madame Geoffrin fully retained the spirit of the advice she had received.

On the death of Madame de Tencin, the bourgeoise effected the long-cherished project of succeeding to her power. She greatly enlarged the circle of her predecessor, and may be said to have founded a new society, which rivalled that of Madame du Deffand; between whom and Madame Geoffrin there accordingly sprang up an open and lasting feeling of enmity.

It was the thirst of worldly distinction which then possessed the members of every class of society, that induced Madame Geoffrin to open a bureaux d'esprit. She knew that

she had no brilliant talents by which she could shine herself, and therefore wished to be considered the friend and patroness of eminent men. Her love of empire, moreover, made her desire to rule quietly over an admired literary court. She was neither extremely witty nor even educated, since she did not know how to spell; but literature and philosophy were then all the rage; Madame Geoffrin complied with the prevailing tone, and opened her house to the philosophic tribe. Notwithstanding the deficiencies of her education, she was well fitted for her self-appointed task: her excellent sense, benevolence, and deep knowledge of the world, adapted her admirably to lead and conciliate the vain and irritable sect she had undertaken to patronise.

Her tact and kindness soon rendered her house one of the rendezvous of the Parisian world. Her power, in time, even became so high that all the German courts, that had any pretensions to philosophy, duly paid correspondents to inform them of the subjects discussed by her circle. One of the first acts of Catherine II., on ascending the imperial throne of Russia, was to send a salaried commissioner to the court of Madame Geoffrin; who, by her consummate tact, had succeeded in rendering it the European school of bon ton. Madame Geoffrin's great study in life had been to gain that acquaintance with the world which was necessary to the position she intended to assume: she soon excelled in this knowledge, which supplied the deficiencies of her education. Though she was not versed either in literature or in art, she drew around her authors and artists, and by listening à propos, and never speaking on what she did not understand, succeeded in presiding with infinite grace and judgment over their meetings.

Madame Geoffrin was not, however, a mere silent listener: she had learned, in the intercourse of persons of high rank, whom she adroitly induced to visit her, that peculiar phraseology, exquisitely polished even in its incorrectness, known as the "style de grand seigneur." No one surpassed her in the art of story-telling: her language was clear, concise, and dis-

played the mingled sense and shrewdness of her mind. The ideas of Madame Geoffrin never soared, however, above her station: she was as essentially a modest and sensible bourgeoise, as Madame du Deffand was a brilliant and Epicurean woman of the world. The plainness of her person, and the elegant simplicity of her attire; the manner in which she provided her house with all the luxurious comforts of wealth, free from its ostentatious éclat; and her own timidity, good sense, and mingled thrift and benevolence, were alike characteristic of the middle classes of life to which she belonged. Her wit was, like everything about her, quiet and unpretending; it never stepped beyond a certain circle: she often gave to the most ingenious ideas a homely and even commonplace form. Her repartees are generally too idiomatic to bear translation. A person was once speaking in her presence of the Abbé Trublet, a man of little talent, but who, by living in the intercourse of Fontenelle and other talented men, had acquired a certain degree of tact and cleverness. "Ah!" said Madame Geoffrin, with her usual bonhomie, "c'est un sot frotté d'esprit"—*a fool rubbed over with wit*, may give some idea of her meaning. This bon-mot had immense success, the poor abbé being very much disliked. There was still more severity in her observation concerning Richelieu and Voisenon, the most corrupt men of the age. "These two men are, after all, only the peelings (épluchures) of great vices." But her most celebrated remark, and that which shews best the kindness and worldly knowledge by which she was so much distinguished, is that which she addressed to her friend Rulhière. He had written a work containing disclosures on the court of Russia, and from the publication of which he expected to derive considerable gains. Madame Geoffrin, thinking, on the contrary, that this work might bring him into trouble, offered him a large sum to suppress it. Rulhière's reply was an elegant declamation against the meanness of accepting money in order to conceal the truth. Madame Geoffrin heard him to the end, she then quietly said, "How much more will you have, Rulhière?" When this

anecdote was related by Rulhière himself to the Prince of Schomberg, the latter, forgetting in the presence of whom he was speaking, enthusiastically exclaimed, "Ah! c'est sublime!"

It was not often that Madame Geoffrin indulged in witticisms: she was, at the same time, severe and indulgent. Her temper, which she took great pains to subdue, was by nature somewhat brusque and impatient; but her judgment was calm, and, as she was perfectly unimaginative, she could seldom be deceived in her opinion—rarely a favourable one—of the characters of those around her. But, whilst experience of the world rendered her a keen judge of human foibles, her kindness of heart made her deal gently with the errors she saw most clearly. "To give and forgive" was her maxim throughout life; and no one ever accused her of having failed in carrying it into practice. So far did she extend her forbearance, even with regard to the most trivial matters, that she held it a duty to listen as attentively to the tedious speeches of a fool as to the brilliant and amusing discourse of a man of wit. "Besides," she philosophically added, when explaining this theory to a friend, "if you let a fool alone, he will talk about himself; and, let him be ever so foolish, this is a subject on which he can scarcely fail to become instructive and eloquent." The close and ever-attentive observer of human nature is betrayed by this remark.

It was this calm good sense and gentle forbearance that constituted Madame Geoffrin's great attraction. She was benevolent; but those who had no benefits to derive from her sought her company as eagerly as those whom she assisted. She did not dazzle like Madame du Deffand, or fascinate like Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; but she had a homely, familiar charm of her own. Without much originality, without acquired knowledge, and even without anything resembling brilliancy or imagination, the quiet, prosaical bourgeoise exercised a power which was widely felt. No one who had seen her once in her own house, neatly but always simply attired, sitting by the fireside in her large arm-chair, her hands de-

murely folded on her knees, her gentle countenance beaming with cheerfulness, whilst she occasionally uttered one of her brief but clear and penetrating remarks—no one who had once seen and heard her thus, but wished to see more of Madame Geoffrin.

It was, indeed, like a mother in the midst of her children, that Madame Geoffrin presided over the circle she had gathered around her. She listened to her friends, spoke very little herself, and was never ashamed of confessing her ignorance. "What!" said she, when an Italian abbé once wished to dedicate to her a grammar of his native language, "dedicate a grammar to me, when I do not even know how to spell?" At the same time, she exercised a direct and motherly control over her guests. They were not to attack the state; their philosophy was to be of the most sober cast; she would not have loud or earnest discussions even on literary subjects: everything was to be quiet, composed, and moderate, like her own feelings. Though she scarcely appeared to interfere in the conversations going on around her, Madame Geoffrin found the means, by her infinite tact, to set to it the precise limits she wished it to have. She was naturally too timid and cautious to tolerate the philosophic exaggerations of her friends. It soon became notorious in "the holy philosophic church," as the philosophers very irreverently styled their body, that "Mère Geoffrin" would by no means allow imprudence of any sort, and that those who frequented her house must necessarily submit to the regulations she thought fit to establish.

Although she thus set very firm bounds to the intellectual freedom which was the very spirit of philosophy, Madame Geoffrin was tenderly loved by her friends. Few could resist the charm of her abrupt but inexhaustible kindness of heart, and those who could have withstood this attraction found her dinners and evening parties too admirably organised to be given up for want of a little complaisance on their part. Madame Geoffrin was, however, thought to carry her empire sometimes too far. Not satisfied with checking the expres-

sion of opinion, she wished to interfere in the private affairs of her friends: always, it is true, with the object of rendering them some service, whether in the shape of advice or of pecuniary assistance. She was proud—and with reason—of her consummate knowledge of the world; and as nothing flattered more her good-natured vanity than to be appealed to in delicate matters, so she was not a little mortified when her counsels were either rejected or despised. One of her fundamental maxims was, that poor literary men were bound to remain single. If, in spite of her advice, some needy author thought fit to marry, she was extremely angry with him; but invariably ended by relenting, visiting his wife, spoiling the children, if there were any, and doing everything in her power to lighten the burden of an increasing family.

But though Madame Geoffrin was an active and disinterested friend, she was not capable of experiencing the heroic and devoted feelings which can raise friendship to the height of a passion. Her friendship was, like her benevolence, without the tenderness which gives those feelings their greatest charm. She was as impatient to oblige her friends as to assist persons in distress; but she did not like to be pained by the sight of the sufferings she relieved: she dreaded emotion under every aspect: to pass quietly through life; to be both useful and respected; and, if possible, never to be annoyed or deranged, was her great object. There was, in all her generosity, a sort of latent selfishness, which rendered it, perhaps, more human, but not the less worthy of respect for this. The greatest blemish in her character was moral timidity: she would do much for a friend, but she could not compromise herself on his account. She never liked to praise her friends to strangers: she averred that it only excited envy. She likewise made it a rule not to defend them if they were attacked in her presence; for this, she said, only irritated their enemies still further.

The same cautiousness marked her own conduct. Notwithstanding her philosophic connexions, Madame Geoffrin was devout; but this she concealed with as much care as another

woman would have taken to hide her love intrigues. She attended mass privately, had an apartment in a convent, and a pew in the church of the Capucins; but all this was conducted with profound mystery, and studiously concealed from her friends. This fact gives a very forcible opinion of the singular intolerance the philosophers exercised. At the same time, and though Madame Geoffrin owed to the position she had assumed the title of foster-mother of the philosophers, she never tolerated the atheism of Diderot, or the doctrines of Helvetius. They both originally belonged to her society; but, though she was attached to them personally, she found the means of quietly dropping their public acquaintance; in consequence of which they joined the society of Baron d'Holbach. This separation was effected without the least éclat, which Madame Geoffrin always feared and disliked. Her subserviency to the opinion of the world was well known amongst her friends, who could ascertain, by the scarcely perceptible variations of her manner, their position in society. When Helvetius had published his celebrated and much-condemned work, he laughingly said—"I shall easily know the effect it has produced on the public, by the manner of Madame Geoffrin on our next meeting."

The wealth of Madame Geoffrin allowed her to indulge in her benevolence—and she seems to have been munificent in a singular degree—as well as in the hospitality she gave to literature, without any detriment to her fortune. Her husband, a quiet and not very clever man, allowed his wife to indulge in her tastes to the fullest extent, and contented himself with superintending the costly entertainments she gave to her guests; by many of whom he was only known as "the old gentleman who sat in a corner saying nothing."

The society which gathered around Madame Geoffrin was composed partly of the disciples of Voltaire, and partly of those of Rousseau; though she tolerated the friends of the Genevese, she had a very ill opinion of his character, the violent and declamatory tone of which was not indeed likely to please her sober judgment. We have already said, that

Madame Geoffrin did not allow great freedom of discussion; but she only moderated the imprudence of her friends: she did not seek to guide them, for the reason that she had few opinions of her own on the subjects they discussed. Thus, notwithstanding her prudence and cautiousness, the society which met at her house was distinguished for the individual independence of its members. Madame Geoffrin gave two dinners a week; one destined to artists, and the other to men of letters. D'Alembert and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse were present at the latter of those dinners. D'Alembert, released from his severe though beloved studies, displayed that frank, boyish mirth which had formerly amused Madame du Deffand. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, more grave than her friend, and, latterly, rather sad and weary-looking, occasionally broke forth from her habitual silence, to speak briefly, and yet eloquently, on the subject discussed by the other guests. Marivaux—who saw a finesse in all that was said or done, and who tortured his subtle but unimaginative mind, in order to give an ingenious turn to everything he uttered—was also there. The cold and reserved Thomas, whose fame has suffered from the proud indifference he felt for the women of his time; the declamatory Raynal; Mairan, the learned antagonist of Madame du Chatelet; her lover, Saint-Lambert; the keen, satirical Galiani; and many now forgotten, but who then had their day, were also among the guests of Madame Geoffrin. She presided at these dinners with her usual tact, directing conversation by occasional interjections—an art in which she excelled—or exercising her talent of story-telling for the amusement of her guests.

Besides the distinction which the friendship of men of talent naturally conferred upon her, the gentle Madame Geoffrin did not fail in worldly honours. Stanislaus Poniatowski, whilst he was still a Polish noble, visited her house, and was a great favourite with her, always calling her by the endearing name of "mother." His extravagance having made him run into debt, he was imprisoned in Fort l'Evêque. Madame Geoffrin, on hearing of his mishap, immediately satisfied the demands

of his creditors. The sovereign did not forget the debt of kindness incurred by the obscure noble; and when Stanislaus had been raised to the throne of Poland, one of his first acts was to write to Madame Geoffrin, "Mamma, your son is king." He invited her, in the same letter, to come and visit him in Warsaw. Notwithstanding her advanced age, Madame Geoffrin complied with his request. Her journey through Germany was a complete triumph; she was especially received with distinguished honours by the Empress Maria Theresa, who was then concluding her alliance with France, and did not neglect this opportunity of shewing the esteem in which she held the nation over which her daughter was to reign. On her arrival in the king's palace, at Warsaw, Madame Geoffrin was inexpressibly touched to find herself introduced into an apartment absolutely similar to that which she occupied in Paris. The attentions of her adopted son, during her sojourn with him, were marked by the same delicacy and gallantry. On her return through Vienna, she again saw Maria Theresa, who presented her daughters to her. Marie Antoinette, when Queen of France, recollected this interview, and on meeting Madame Geoffrin, at a subsequent epoch, reminded her of it in flattering terms. Such was the importance in which the quiet Madame Geoffrin was then held, that the least details of her journey to Poland, and the letters which she wrote home to her friends, occupied all the polite world of Paris during the time of her absence. She even acquired a sort of political power, or rather influence, through the friendship of Prince Kaunitz, one of the distinguished foreigners who visited her house. Owing to her intervention, he softened the difficulties which awaited Cardinal Rohan's embassy at the court of Vienna.

Nothing had been wanting to gratify the ambition of the kind-hearted and amiable bourgeoise when the increasing infirmities of old age told her of her approaching end. She understood the warning, and submitted to her fate, with calm and unaffected resignation. The latter days of her life were, however, embittered by the quarrels of her philosophic friends

with her daughter, Madame de la Ferté-Imbault; who had always manifested the greatest antipathy for the whole tribe of authors who visited her mother's house, and many of whom were, she knew, wholly dependent upon her bounty. This lady refused, during the last illness of her mother, to admit D'Alembert, Morellet, and Marmontel into her presence; alleging that they would, according to the custom of ultra-philosophers in such cases, have endeavoured to prevent Madame Geoffrin from fulfilling her religious duties. Without contradicting this imputation, the philosophers complained very bitterly of Madame de la Ferté-Imbault's conduct, and were so unrestrained in their language that, when Madame Geoffrin partly recovered, she found herself compelled, by the éclat they had made, to cease seeing either her daughter or her three friends. She naturally decided the case in favour of Madame de la Ferté-Imbault, and, without wholly approving her conduct—which had been as deficient in tact and wisdom as that of the philosophers was in delicacy—she observed, with a smile, "that she had acted like Godefroy de Bouillon, by defending her tomb against the infidels." With the exception of D'Alembert, Morellet, and Marmontel, she saw all her friends as usual, until a relapse of her complaint carried her off, in the autumn of 1777; she was then in the seventy-eighth year of her age.

Nothing could exceed the serenity of her last hours. Two days before her death some of her friends, who were seated near her bedside, discussed aloud the means a government possessed of rendering men happier. Every one had given his opinion on the subject, when Madame Geoffrin, who then suffered acutely, wakening up from her seeming torpor, quietly observed, "You have not spoken of the duty of governments to procure pleasures for their subjects: sufficient attention has never been paid to this point." The same wish of quiet, practical usefulness, which had been her characteristic throughout life, animated her to the last.

Notwithstanding her inexhaustible kindness, and many high qualities, the excellent Madame Geoffrin was very soon

forgotten; even by those who had formerly derived most benefits from her friendship. A few there were, however, like Madame Suard, the author's wife, who could not pass by the house where Madame Geoffrin had once resided, without pausing to bless in their hearts the gentle memory of her who had dwelt there so long. D'Alembert felt the loss of his old friend very deeply. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, with whom he had been in the habit of spending his evenings, had not long been dead, and every morning he went to seek consolation in the society of the kind and soothing Madame Geoffrin. "Alas!" he mournfully exclaimed, when she too was taken from him—"Alas! I have now neither evenings nor mornings left!"

The deaths of Hume, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and Madame Geoffrin, occurring, as they did, within the space of one year, were serious losses to the philosophic party; which gradually declined in strength as a compact body, whilst it daily acquired new power by disseminating its doctrines more widely. The bureau d'esprit of Madame Geoffrin may almost be considered as the last of its class. It is true that she was outlived by Madame du Deffand; but her society, as has already been shewn, was latterly only the shadow of what it once had been: the ill-temper of the selfish, blind, old woman, repelled even her most intimate and attached friends. The influence of Madame Geoffrin was great in one sense, and inconsiderable in another. It was extensive, but not deep. To assist her friends, to give them a social tone, to impart to them her keen practical knowledge of the world, such was her object, apart from her personal views of securing general esteem and good-will. She succeeded in effecting her aim, and went no further: she repressed the imprudence of some views expressed by her protégés; but abstained from substituting for them any opinions of her own: she felt her deficiencies, and acted wisely. At the same time she proved an auxiliary of considerable value to the encyclopédistes, for the furtherance of whose work she is said to have spent very large sums.

The "Encyclopédie," from a purely scientific undertaking, had then assumed the tone and importance of a party affair. This was chiefly owing to the injudicious opposition of Government, by whom it was forbidden, and in spite of whom it was universally read. Inflated by their success, the authors of the "Encyclopédie" henceforth assumed the most sectarian and intolerant tone: they literally crushed all those who ventured to oppose them or their doctrines. Gilbert, the unhappy and gifted poet, not only disdained their applause, but had the audacity to expose their ridicules in his admirable satires. This independence proved fatal to him: persecuted and reviled, he closed his brief and troubled life in an hospital; whilst hundreds of men without his genius were flattered and admired in every fashionable drawing-room.

With Madame Geoffrin, as we have already said, closed the bureaux d'esprit. It may now, perhaps, be asked, What influence did those assemblies exercise over the eighteenth century? This influence depended greatly on the individual characters of the women by whom it was possessed. Clear and analytic with Madame de Tencin, artistic under Madame de la Popelinière, brilliant and selfish when exercised by Madame du Deffand, eloquent when by Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and half kind half worldly with Madame Geoffrin, it was eminently a social influence; but, unless in the sense that society reacts on literature, it was not literary.

The women of the eighteenth century rendered society singularly polished and elegant; but they could not prevent it from being tainted by the evil tendencies which such large and artificial meetings as those they presided over must necessarily have. The variety of pleasures necessary to amuse so many individuals bred habits of frivolous thought and ill-concealed ennui. Every subject was treated with heartless levity: enthusiasm, serious thought, or generous impulses, were alike proscribed and withered by the cold, worldly spirit which then prevailed. It was natural that the sense of the ridiculous should be strongly developed amongst individuals, who, after all, had little else to do than to laugh

good-naturedly at their friends; for spite or hatred were feelings far too strong and deep for them. Occasionally such beings as Madame du Deffand, with her open rancour, or Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, with her fervour and enthusiasm, would break through the bounds of this artificial world; and were almost equally blamed by those who could see no greater crime than to infringe the state of polite indifference which they had fixed upon as the supreme bon ton.

At the same time, and with all their defects, these assemblies had a singular power in arousing the intellect, and that vivacity of thought, in itself a very indifferent accomplishment, but which is so often mistaken for a higher faculty. It was to this their awakening power on the mind that Rousseau alluded, when he exclaimed—"Are you in doubt whether you have or not any genius? go to Paris, and if you have got any you will soon feel it fermenting in your breast." And yet this might more truly be said of ambition than of genius! Where many men meet together, and individualities merge into one another and fade away, a tone of commonplace feeling pervades the whole mass; general harmony is the result: and it may be well that it should be thus, but the home of genius is not there. Self-communion and solitude are its daily bread: for what is genius but a great and strongly-marked individuality—but an original, creative being, standing forth alone amidst the undistinguishable throng of our everyday world? Genius is a lonely power; it is not communicative; it is not the gift of a crowd; it is not a reflection cast from without upon the soul. It is essentially an inward light, diffusing its clear and glorious radiance over the external world. It is a broad flood pouring freely forth its deep waters; but, with its source, for ever hidden from human ken. It is the creator, and not the creature: it calls forth glorious and immortal shapes; but it is called into being by none—save God.

What had such a power to do with bureaux d'esprit and drawing-room praise? What could it gain, even from the exquisite polish they gave, but heavy golden fetters! To

encourage talent, especially when displayed externally; to favour the development of so-called philosophy; to aid in the task of social destruction, even whilst they made society more elegant and accomplished, was the real task of the bureaux d'esprit: they fulfilled it; but beyond this their power did not extend. Few coteries have ever done so much: none could now do more.



Madame de Pompadour.

(AS LA BELLE JARDINIÈRE.)

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME DE POMPADOUR — HER POLITICAL POWER AND GENERAL INFLUENCE—MADAME DU MARCHAIS AND THE ECONOMISTS—MADAME DU BARRY—DEATH OF LOUIS XV.

However degrading for society it may be to confess it, it is nevertheless true, that, besides the democratic influence of the bureaux d'esprit, there existed another power in French society during the eighteenth century—the power of royal mistresses; exercised, not because they were clever or intelligent women, but because they were the acknowledged favourites of a profligate monarch.

On the death of Madame de Chateauroux, Richelieu, anxious to console the king for her loss, and to have the honour of procuring him another mistress as attractive, went to seek the beautiful Madame de Flavacour, and offered her the post which had been successively occupied by her four sisters. She coldly listened to his proposals, and merely replied, "I prefer, to what you offer me, the esteem of my contemporaries." Several other ladies of equal virtue were found, even at the court of Louis XV.; but too many eagerly sought the disgraceful honour a simple bourgeoise was destined to win.

Before the king left Versailles for his army in Flanders, the keen eye of Madame de Chateauroux had noticed a singularly beautiful woman who always placed herself in the path of Louis XV. whenever he hunted in the forest of Senart. The instinct of jealousy led her to suspect in this unknown lady (for she did not belong to the court) a future rival. Her surmise was correct; and when the king's grief for her loss had somewhat abated, Madame de Chateauroux was succeeded in the post of royal favourite by the intriguing Madame le Nor-

mand d'Etiolles, better known as Madame de Pompadour. According to some accounts, Jeannette Poisson, the daughter of a Parisian butcher, had been early destined by her parents to the rank of the king's mistress. Circumstances not favouring this project, she was married to a young and wealthy financier. She shone for a while in the Parisian circles; till having, by her private intrigues, succeeded in securing the king's favour, she suddenly deserted her husband, and, residing openly in the palace of Versailles, she received the badge of her degradation in the title of Marchioness of Pompadour. M. d'Etiolles, disconsolate at the loss of his wife, whom he idolised, vainly offered to forgive her everything if she would only come back. She refused in the most peremptory manner to return to his house. Unprincipled and aspiring, she not only intended to rule Louis XV. completely, but, though both the queen and her own husband were still living, she even entertained the ambitious hope of becoming the king's wife at some future period, and thus rivalling the power and fame of Madame de Maintenon.

Besides the exquisite grace and beauty of her person, the loveliness and regularity of her features, and that ever-varying expression which gave them an irresistible charm, Madame de Pompadour possessed all the versatility of talent and the meretricious arts necessary to the favourite sultana of a king already blasé in his tastes. She not only played and sang admirably, but danced with singular grace and elegance. Her acting was equal to that of the most celebrated actresses of the day; her conversation easy, brilliant, and fascinating. From the time that she became the king's mistress to the epoch of her death, to please and amuse her royal lover was the sole study of her life. Lest even her admirable beauty should lose its fascinations, she was ever surprising Louis XV. by presenting it to his gaze under a new aspect. Sometimes she appeared before him clad as a peasant girl, assuming all the simplicity and rustic grace of this character. She took with equal ease the voluptuous appearance of a languishing Venus, or the proud beauty of a Diana. To these disguises often

succeeded the modest garb of a nun, when, with affected humility and downcast eyes, she came to meet the king. What was such a life but one of endless, degrading slavery?

The character of Madame de Pompadour may be traced in her conduct towards her husband. She was cold, selfish, and ambitious. She had no sooner secured a firm hold on the king's heart than she resolved to govern the state. Her penetration shewed her that Louis XV. might not love her long, but that, if she could render herself necessary to him, her position would nevertheless remain safe. It was for this that she did not scruple to encourage and assist his obscure intrigues, from which she felt that she had little to fear. The foundation of that infamous establishment where Louis XV. kept young girls, whom he had in many instances caused to be forcibly taken from their parents, is even attributed to Madame de Pompadour. From the first she resolved to be, not only the king's mistress, but also his prime minister. The indolent monarch willingly yielded up to her the reins of the state. Madame de Pompadour soon acquired great tact in the management of affairs; but she was reckless and unprincipled, and her political power hastened the ruin of monarchy, whilst it increased the evils of France. She abhorred the very name of Fleury, and did her best to destroy the good which the cardinal had effected. The men whom she successively called to govern the country with her, Bernis and the Duke of Choiseul, were too completely her tools to counteract her folly, had they been desirous of doing so. Bernis was the the same abbé to whom Fleury had refused a living, and who had prophetically replied, "J'attendrai!" On learning the favour of Madame de Pompadour, with whom he was slightly acquainted, he went to see her, and repeated to her some flowery verses in her praise. Madame de Pompadour, greatly pleased, gave him a pension, and received him into her intimacy. He ingratiated himself so much into her favour by his gaiety and versifying talents, that, after making him an ambassador, she ended by raising him to the post of minister. The conduct of Bernis was such as might have been expected

from "Babet Bouquetière du Parnasse," (the name his rosy cheeks had earned him from Voltaire, whilst he was only a needy abbé.) The most important negotiations were intrusted to men of his own stamp, and whose sole recommendation was that of having pleased Madame de Pompadour, by talents similar to those which had won him her favour.

France thus lost the alliance of Prussia. It is also asserted, that the ridicule with which Frederic II. thought fit to speak of Bernis's poetry, and the appellation of Cotillon II., which he bestowed on Madame de Pompadour—in allusion to her having succeeded Cotillon I., that is, Madame de Chateauroux—deeply irritated these two powerful personages. Through neglect, intentional or not, they at least allowed themselves to be forestalled by England in the alliance of Prussia. When these two powers had concluded the treaty of Westminster, Madame de Pompadour was induced, by her own personal vanity, to engage France in an alliance with Austria. Maria Theresa, learning her favourable intentions, lost no time in writing her a friendly letter, in which she named the royal courtesan her *chère amie.* Filled with pride at this mark of distinction, Madame de Pompadour found it easy to work on the feelings of Louis XV. His personal dislike and jealousy of the Prussian monarch, whose great talents seemed to cast a reproach on his own degrading life, made him lend a willing ear to the proposal of allying himself with Austria. A treaty was secretly drawn up at Babiole—Madame de Pompadour's country-house—between Bernis and Stahrenberg. This treaty—so fatal to the best interests of the nation—created universal indignation and astonishment. Austria had for several centuries been the open enemy of France; and, only a few years previously, the French had done everything to precipitate from her throne the empress-queen they were now bound to support. Then, it is true, Madame de Chateauroux wished to have the glory of making an emperor, and now Madame de Pompadour had been called the "dear friend" of Maria Theresa.

These were a few amongst the *great* motives which decided

the Seven Years' War, covered the military glory of France with shame, and led to the fatal marriage of Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI. Madame de Pompadour had also other reasons of her own for her conduct in this matter. It was war which secured her power: as long as it lasted, her talents rendered her necessary to the king, and she need fear no rival. All the European powers which had adopted her line of policy towards Frederic II. were also interested that she should continue to be at the head of affairs. If Louis XV. had then taken another mistress, with sympathies in favour of Prussia, instead of Austria, this great event might have changed the aspect of Europe. But the chains of habit, far more than those of love, riveted him to Madame de Pompadour. Conscious of her power, the proud and imperious favourite assumed the style of a queen. Her femmes de chambre were ladies of noble birth, and she caused her steward to be made a knight of the order of Saint Louis. Her esquire, the Chevalier d'Hénin, a relative of the Princes of Chimay, and a member of one of the most noble families of the empire, might be seen walking respectfully by the side of her sedan chair, with her cloak on his arm, in order to cover her shoulders with it as soon as she should alight. He accompanied her for the same purpose when she went visiting, and waited for her in the antechamber, if it was necessary to do so.

It would have been well for France if Madame de Pompadour had remained satisfied with such marks of distinction. But this unprincipled woman, who named bishops and generals as well as ministers—who gave instructions to ambassadors, and addressed them in the first person plural, as though she had become identified with royalty or France—asserted her power, and seemed doomed to cause the misfortunes of her country, by her unhappy and capricious choice of men. Richelieu and Soubise were not only favoured by her in every respect, but, to the military shame of France, intrusted with the highest posts in the army. She was, however, keenly alive to the disgrace their errors brought down

on her judgment, and unreasonably charged them with the consequences of her folly. When De Bernis ventured to oppose a line of policy so fatal to France as that which she adopted, Madame de Pompadour greatly resented this act of independence, and obliged him to withdraw from the ministry; reminding him, with a taunt she had no right to inflict, that another sort of talent than that of versifying was necessary in order to govern a nation. Cardinal de Bernis—for the favour of Madame de Pompadour had gained him this dignity—retired to Rome, and was succeeded in the management of affairs by Stainville, afterwards Duke of Choiseul, and another of the creatures of the royal favourite.

Clever, though too light and volatile—haughty, and yet supple—the Duke of Choiseul had early learned the art of ingratiating himself in female favour; thus carrying into practice the advice of Madame de Montmorin to her son: "If you wish to succeed in France, fall in love with all the women." His light, caustic wit, and skilful flattery, compensated for the insignificance of his personal appearance. The universal, and not very disinterested desire, which then existed, of making gallantry a means of success in ambition, had reacted on the character of the men by whom it was employed. Women are excellent judges of a certain species of individual merit. An elegant address, natural manners, taste, wit, and eloquence, generally find favour with them. The superficial nature of their education renders them less capable of appreciating gravity of thought and solidity of judgment. The men whose task and interest it was to please women, naturally adopted the manners most likely to accomplish this purpose. But, though female influence thus gave an undue importance to mere externals, the frivolous tone of society, and the tendency which therefore existed to govern it by the laws of ridicule, were not exclusively the work of women: these characteristics of the last century may more fairly be attributed to the want of political rights, which induced men to win by favour and intrigue what they might have sought openly in a free country.

Whilst Madame de Pompadour governed the state, Louis XV. continued his life of indolence and shameless profligacy. He was by far too clear-sighted not to perceive that monarchy was declining, and that a great change must necessarily take place in the condition of the nation; but not even this knowledge could rouse him from his selfish apathy. He felt tolerably certain that no serious disturbance would occur during his lifetime; "The rest concerns my successor," he often observed. It did, indeed, concern the hapless Louis XVI. The prestige which had so long environed Louis XV. vanished; for his people saw what sort of a king was on the throne. Louis XV., the beloved, was now named thus only in the almanacs, published every year: the endearing epithet had long been erased from every heart in France. When he appeared in public, he was received with ominous silence,—contempt and hatred were the secret feelings of those who gazed on him. A life of voluptuous indulgence soon bred satiety: ennui, as well as a feeling of inquisitiveness natural to unoccupied minds, made Louis XV. seek for amusement in an acquaintance with all the scandalous news of the day. To know the minutest details of the private life of his courtiers and ministers, as well as to be informed of all the intrigues that took place in Paris, was one of the greatest pleasures and most earnest occupations of the king. For this purpose he kept a private police of his own; being too suspicious to trust entirely to the lieutenant of police. This functionary was, however, summoned every Sunday to the presence of the king, with whom he spent several hours. He then laid before his majesty every fact of importance or interest which numerous spies, of every rank, had discovered in the course of the week. It was also his task to read to him the extracts from letters which had been unsealed and read by the post-office authorities,—an infamous custom, first introduced under Louis XIV. by the minister Louvois. Louis XV. sometimes communicated to his ministers these extracts from the private correspondence of his subjects. The Duke of Choiseul was often favoured thus; but, being naturally indiscreet, he

divulged amongst his acquaintances matters affecting the honour of individuals, or exposing them to scorn and ridicule. The king, besides the information he thus gained, also heard every morning five classes of police reports, concerning the princes of the blood, the courtiers, bishops, ministers, clergymen, women of dissolute life, &c.

Louis XV. also indulged in another amusement. He always affected to separate the king from Louis of Bourbon; and whilst he allowed his mistresses and ministers to give their instructions to the ambassadors he sent to foreign courts, he employed secret agents of his own to counteract their designs by petty artifices: the pleasure of teazing those to whom he had yielded up his power being the sole object of this contemptible conduct. The truth was that the king had grown profoundly ennuyé and selfish. Life had lost its illusions for him, and he was annoyed by the sight of pleasure or happiness in others. A sardonic smile disfigured his still handsome features: to inflict pain or annoyance had become a real pleasure for him. If a courtier affected a youthful tone no longer in accordance with his years, the king, whose memory was unerring in this respect, never failed to remind him of his age: he was the first to detect in others wrinkles and all the signs of declining years. To those who were afflicted with illness, the king spoke of their end as inevitable, or at least as approaching. Often, when he travelled with Madame de Pompadour, he caused the carriage to stop near a churchyard, in order to learn if it contained any newly-made grave. Notwithstanding the horror such subjects gave her, the king delighted to speak to his mistress of death. Like many voluptuaries, he was of a melancholy, and even morbid disposition.

The court over which Louis XV. and Madame de Pompadour presided was fully worthy of them. That confusion which is inseparable from a great convulsion regined there, as well as in every other portion of society. The old noblesse were cast into the shade by a new and more wealthy aristocracy, sprung from the bourgeoisie, and which bought

lands, vassals, and feudal titles. When ranks are thus displaced in a nation, owing to the decay of one class and the rise of another, it is a proof that the institutions are no longer fitted to the age; and from that moment they necessarily become despised and unjust. A greater feeling of equality sprang from this state of things; though, as it did not result from the natural tone of society, but, on the contrary, from its corruption, it only proved another sign of evil.

Both the new and the old nobility joined in the common pursuit of pleasure before their final fall. Bad taste and frivolousness marked their amusements. Titled ladies, who eagerly sought the favour of being allowed a seat in the presence of Madame de Pompadour, visited in secret the popular ball of the Porcherons, or amused themselves by breaking plates and glasses in obscure cabarets, assuming the free and reckless tone of men. Their husbands in the meanwhile embroidered at home, or paced the stately galleries of Louis XIV. at Versailles,—a little painted figure of cardboard in one hand, whilst with the other they drew the string which put it in motion. This preposterous amusement even spread throughout the whole nation, and grave magistrates were to be met in the streets playing, like the rest, with their *pantins*.*

The general degeneracy of the times was acknowledged even by those who shared in it. The old nobles ascribed it to that fatal evil—the want of female chastity. Never, indeed, had this social stain been so universal or so great. "Had our race remained pure from the intermixture of plebeian blood," they argued, in their pride, "we could not have fallen so low."

With all this profligacy there was mingled a strong philosophic tone. Towards the close of Louis XV.'s reign, and to the king's infinite displeasure, the Anglomania assumed a

* This childish folly was satirised in the following epigram :—

"D'un peuple frivole et volage,
Pantin fut la divinité.
Faut-il être s'il chérissait l'image
Dont il est la réalité?"

marked popularity. The ingenious possessors of "pantins" visited England, in order, as they said, "to learn how to think." The progress of this spirit was visible even in those whose position bound them most to resist it. Madame Louise, the daughter of Louis XV., when she had determined on embracing a monastic life, chose the Carmelite order, because, in this order, there is no perpetual abbess, but a superior elected every three years: a custom which the daughter of an absolute king thought more in accordance with the spirit of equality. Her brother, the dauphin, and who was considered the foe of the philosophers, whilst he approved the condemnation of Rousseau's "Emile," observed of the "Contrat Social,"—"The case is different with this work; it only treats of the rights of kings, and these can be discussed." When institutions begin to know their own weakness, is not their hour nigh? The royal and aristocratic element was declining, whilst the popular and philosophic power rose in the ascendant; and both parties felt that it was so.

Whilst monarchy was thus swiftly and surely undermined by society itself, the weak and vacillating power seemed anxious to hasten its own ruin. The mass of the nation had become more intellectually enlightened, and more immoral than it had ever yet been; and yet the court persisted in its weak, despotic course of conduct. Government alternately yielded to the spirit of the age, or vainly sought to control it. Scepticism was abroad, and practical intolerance was still exercised by the clergy. State prisons were filled with untried captives, the victims of favourites and royal mistresses, at the very time when democratic philosophy was most popular. The right of a nation to govern itself was already discussed, yet Choiseul ministered to the extravagance of the king and his mistress, as though the wealth of the kingdom were their own private property. At the same time, no one was unconscious that a great crisis was inevitable. The subject was even discussed in the drawing-room of Madame de Pompadour, and in the hearing of her confidential attendant

Madame du Hausset, who thus alludes to this remarkable fact :—

"'This kingdom,' said Mirabeau, (the father of the celebrated tribune,) 'is in a deplorable state. There is neither national energy nor the only substitute for it—money.' 'It can only be regenerated,' said La Rivière, 'by a conquest like that of China, or by some great internal convulsion : but woe to those who live to see that ! The French people do not do things by halves.' These words made me tremble, and I hastened out of the room."

Madame de Pompadour herself was aware that the actual system was doomed to perish, but satisfied with her favourite exclamation,—"Après nous, le déluge,"—Let the flood come when we are gone,—she did nothing to effect a radical change. Her caprices increased the evils which were ruining the State : favourites and ministers succeeded one another under her sway ; they knew the unstable tenure of their power, and hastened with their creatures to drain the resources of the country before their day was past. But if Madame de Pompadour's guilt was great, so was the retribution by which it was attended.

The most rigid moralist could not have desired a severer punishment for the king's mistress than that brought down upon her by her own vices. The last year of this woman who governed France—who received more than queenly honours from the courtiers, and who lived surrounded by all the pleasures boundless wealth can give—were literally poisoned and abridged by a soul-devouring ennui. The death of her daughter by her husband, and whom she had destined to marry one of the first nobles in the land, filled her with grief. The loss of her beauty, and the increasing indifference of the king, added to her melancholy. She often declared that, for a handsome woman, death itself was better than to see her charms fading away.

With all her vices, Madame de Pompadour was not insensible to the unhappy state of France. She saw and lamented that very degeneracy of the times which she had aided, and to

which she owed her elevation. She had imbibed enough of the philosophic spirit to perceive that the country was on the brink of ruin; and not even her selfish exclamation, "After us, the flood,"—could always stifle the voice of her conscience.

It was no slight addition to her grief, that the general hatred of the nation ascribed to her all the misery of France. Every unpopular measure of the cabinet, every reverse in war, was laid to the detested name of Pompadour. If to these causes of melancholy be added general ill health, and the consciousness that habit and pity were the only feelings the king now felt for her, it need scarcely be wondered that Madame de Pompadour should term the life she led "a continual death." At the same time, she had not enough courage or principle to leave the scene of her splendid misery. Pride kept her chained to her throne, and made her reign to the last. It is, however, probable that if Madame de Pompadour had lived longer, she might have edified the world with the sight of her conversion. The unaffected piety of the injured queen inspired her with involuntary admiration and respect for religion. Very different, indeed, were the declining years of Marie Lecsinska and those of the Marchioness of Pompadour. The patient and pious queen laid her sufferings at the foot of the Cross: insulted by her husband and his mistresses; neglected by the courtiers; deeply afflicted by the loss of her children, whom she had loved most tenderly, she still found in religion the courage necessary to support her grief, and effectual consolations in the practice of a boundless benevolence.

Ennui, shame, and remorse, marked the last days of Madame de Pompadour. The king, indeed, was induced by compassion to pay her the greatest attention during her last illness. She was, contrary to the usual etiquette in such cases, allowed to die at Versailles—the exclusive privilege of royalty. Her will remained, to the last, the law of France, and she issued forth orders even from her deathbed. But, scarcely had she ceased to exist when her remains were unceremoniously hurried out of the palace, and the king, looking from his window, coolly remarked that the marquise had rainy

weather for this her last journey. It was to be thus honoured and thus loved that Madame de Pompadour had sacrificed all that woman should hold most dear and revered.

Though the social influence of Madame de Pompadour was far from being great or extended, it is worthy of consideration. The mistresses of Louis XV. had more direct political action than those of his predecessor, but their general power on society was infinitely less. Notwithstanding her talents and the good education she had received, Madame de Pompadour never lost the tone of a bourgeoise. She gave evident proofs of vulgarity in the coarse nicknames which she bestowed on her female friends. She was imitated in this by the king, who called his daughters by appellations little remarkable for either delicacy or euphony. The taste of Madame de Pompadour was essentially bad: as her admiration of Bernis' verses would suffice to shew, did not the school of art she encouraged prove it more clearly still. The shepherdess in hoops of Watteau and Boucher, and the corrupt style which distinguished the fashions in dress and furniture of the period, owe much to her patronage. She exaggerated the defects of her contemporaries, and never endeavoured to substitute for them anything of pure artistic beauty. She had, however, the merit of having led to the establishment of the manufactory of Sèvres porcelain.

Madame de Pompadour was desirous of securing a literary influence; which, with her power of giving places and pensions, would have been an easy matter, had she known how to act. She, indeed, pensioned such second-rate authors as Marmontel, Duclos, and Bernis; but though Voltaire unblushingly protested that he was devoted to her, because it was his duty, *as a good citizen*, to be so,—apparently considering the existence and position of a royal mistress as a sort of national institution,—she did not care to influence the king in his favour. Louis XV. always disliked that intellectual monarch, whose reign, he felt, eclipsed his own. Both he and Madame de Pompadour were so blind to their real interests as to neglect the power they might have secured, until it was

beyond their grasp, and fell into the hands of Parisian ladies and farmers-general. Madame de Pompadour did, indeed, attempt to *tame*, as she said, Rousseau, and accordingly sent a hundred louis to the proud and irritable author. He declined her present in a letter of such haughtiness that she was wounded to the quick, and protested she would have nothing more to do with that *owl*. The truth was, that the literary and philosophic party expected more than pensions from Madame de Pompadour; the time was gone when they could be so easily satisfied: they aimed at receiving from her no less than the same degree of flattery and consideration awarded to them in every Parisian circle.

But, though she could venture to direct the destinies of France, Madame de Pompadour shrank from the responsibility of encouraging too openly the formidable philosophic power: at the same time she committed the great error of bestowing on that power the sort of encouragement which entitles the receiver to expect more. Through her favourite medical attendant, Quesnay, she often communicated with Diderot, D'Alembert, Duclos, Helvetius, Turgot, and Buffon,—freely mingling with them when they visited Quesnay's entresol in Versailles, but never asking them up into her own drawing-room. The men whom Frederic and Catherine had accustomed to the praise of crowned heads, were not likely to be highly flattered by the indirect notice of Madame de Pompadour. Another error which she committed was to endeavour to place Crébillon, the tragic poet, above Voltaire. Crébillon, was poor; she wanted a poet to patronise and exalt; she chose him. Voltaire, deeply irritated, never forgave her this offence. Madame du Maine, who in matters of taste was still influential, zealously defended her former protégé; and Madame de Pompadour had the mortification of perceiving that, though no one denied Crébillon's tragic power, Voltaire, in spite of all she might do, was still the great idol of the age.

Madame de Pompadour was more successful when, entering into the views of the philosophers, she aided them in the expulsion of the Jesuits. Notwithstanding the disinclination of

the king, and the opposition of the whole royal family, she succeeded with the aid of her creature, Choiseul, in banishing the Jesuits from France, ten years before their order was expelled from the other European states. It has been said that she was actuated in this by a motive of personal animosity; and, though the assertion is not, perhaps, sufficiently proved, there is nothing in the life and character of Madame de Pompadour, to justify the belief that she acted from a feeling of principle. The expulsion of the Jesuits was a very serious blow given to religion in France. Choiseul, the philosophers, and the Parliament, united their efforts to those of Madame de Pompadour, in order to carry a measure they all desired, though through widely different motives. The Parliament unwisely yielded to their old prejudices as Jansenists, and eagerly aided the philosophers; for whom, on other occasions, their only feeling was one of bitter hostility.

Whatever opinion may be held of the Jesuits,—and it is not our intention to discuss here the merits of this celebrated order,—their expulsion was certainly not justified then. They had possessed no real power in France since Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon: they were, indeed, protected by the Queen, Marie Leesinska, but she was utterly without influence. It was precisely because they were so weak, that they were attacked. Institutions perish when the strength against which violence would have been of no avail has long been spent. It is not when they stand in the evil pride of their power, but it is when they grow feeble and decayed, that the memory of past hatred rises up against them, and their fall seems then less an act of justice than one of vengeance.

Madame de Pompadour was less successful when she attempted to exercise her power in favour of the parliaments, who were then openly protected by Choiseul. "Do not mention them!" once hastily observed Louis XV., starting up from the apathy with which he usually acceded to the plans of his mistress, "I tell you they are an assembly of republicans." Madame de Pompadour interfered with more success when she encouraged the doctrines of political economy: one

of the results of the new philosophy. She did not, indeed, modify these doctrines by any original views of her own, but she did much by favouring their free development.

The deep, heart-rending misery of the working-classes had at length forced itself on public attention. Persons of every rank began to consider the best means of alleviating a wretchedness to which even the king and Madame de Pompadour could not remain wholly insensible. Quesnay, their favourite surgeon, was one of the most popular economists: his views were inserted in the "Encyclopédie," with the chief writers of which he was on intimate terms. He had also many influential friends among men of rank: one of his adherents was Mirabeau the elder, that "friend of man" who wrote twenty volumes of philanthropic works, and behaved like a fierce tyrant to all those over whom he had power. Louis XV. took some interest in his physician's system, and indulged in the novel amusement of causing his essays to be printed, revising the proofs with his own royal hand. Gournay opposed the views of Quesnay by a system based on wholly different principles. This difference of opinion led to a bitter controversy between their respective partisans. The women, as usual, took an active share in the matter: most of them imperiously proscribed in their circle any views but those they had chosen to adopt; those who would willingly have remained indifferent on such subjects were not allowed to do so; so deeply and universally felt was the necessity of some radical change.

None shewed more zeal in the cause of political economy than the pretty and agreeable Madame du Marchais, a relative of Madame de Pompadour's, and the wife of the dauphin's valet de chambre. Though this lady held a somewhat subordinate position, her connexion with Madame de Pompadour, and the great charm of her conversation, drew around her the most eminent men of the day, and rendered her little apartment in the palace of Versailles the rendezvous of the most intellectual society of those times. There was much in Madame du Marchais, afterwards Madame d'Angivilliers, to

fascinate and attract. She was diminutive in person, but pretty and graceful as a fairy. Her mind was remarkable for two high and rare qualities: an extreme clearness of understanding and a complete impartiality, even with regard to those subjects which interested her most. Madame du Marchais was thus admirably adapted to the part she had taken on herself as expounder of the rival systems of the day. The elegant perspicuity of her language, the precision with which she conveyed, in a few words, the substance of whatever treatise or discourse she wished to condense for the benefit of her hearers, were invaluable to her friends, at an epoch when the fate of the most important questions often hung on the manner in which they were discussed. The comprehensiveness of her intellect enabled Madame du Marchais to abstract herself whenever she pleased from ordinary cares, without neglecting them in the main. Her mind was stored with all that had been written for or against the science she favoured; she was an authority to be consulted with perfect safety, for no party spirit ever disfigured the clearness and calmness of her statements. The letters of Turgot to Terrai, Necker's treatises, the dialogues of Galiani, and Morellet's refutations were alike read and consulted by the dispassionate Madame du Marchais.

Though she saw persons of every class, Madame du Marchais chiefly received academicians and political economists. La Harpe, Diderot, Marmontel, D'Alembert, Duclos, Thomas, and Quesnay constantly met at her house. Such was her influence that she not only named academicians whenever vacant seats occurred in the Academy, but she had even the occult power of directing the motions of that body; whom she once caused to propose a eulogy of Sully for the "concours" of eloquence. The essay of Thomas had the prize; but the triumph he obtained was less his own than that of Madame du Marchais's friend, Quesnay, whose principles he had developed under the name of Sully. Never, indeed, was literature less free and independent than in those times, when even the fairy tales of Duclos took a philosophic turn.

The inclinations and great talents of Madame du Marchais entitled her to do for political economy in France what Madame du Chatelet had effected for Leibnitz and Newton before her: such, indeed, was her aim, and she devoted her whole energies and attention to the purpose of aiding the progress of doctrines she believed calculated to rescue her country from its unhappy condition. Time shewed that deeper changes than those it was in the power of political economy to effect for France were needful; but the aim of Madame du Marchais was not the less noble or pure. Madame du Deffand, incapable of appreciating anything elevated or unselfish, sought to chase her ever-renewing ennui by attacking all the economists with the utmost coarseness and vehemence. She partook, however, of Madame du Marchais's excellent suppers, in company with the hated tribe, but did not fail to turn her friend into ridicule on every favourable occasion. Undeterred by her satirical remarks, Madame du Marchais steadily persevered in her object. Many women of those times shone more than she did by the exercise of frivolous talents, but none had an aim so disinterested and so useful.

The favour, and consequently the power of the Duke of Choiseul continued even after the death of Madame de Pompadour. His light frivolous manner of treating the most important state matters amused without ever wearying the king. As long as Choiseul remained minister, the philosophic party—especially that worldly epicurean portion which met at the house of Madame du Deffand—raised their patron to the skies, and enjoyed a considerable degree of his countenance. Thus encouraged, they expressed their opinions with still greater freedom than they had been in the habit of manifesting. The death of Louis XV.'s only son was also a great subject of triumph to the philosophers. They supposed the dauphin, as a moral and religious prince, to be their natural foe: he was, indeed, the foe of their errors; but he had a virtue of which they new nothing, and that was a singular tolerance for opinions the most opposed



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Madame du Barry.

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to his own. But he was the partisan of the Jesuits, and very much opposed to the power of Choiseul: these were the real causes of the dislike of the philosophers. He died at Compiègne, where the court was delayed until his decease, which was hourly expected, should have taken place. The prince, who remained sensible to the last, could see from the window of his room the preparations which all the courtiers were making for their approaching departure. "They are getting impatient; it is time for me to be gone," he observed to his doctor, with a bitter smile. The agony of this last hour was, however, soothed by the devotedness of the dauphiness: a pure, noble-minded woman, who waited on her husband, through his long and painful illness, with unwearied love, and who died of grief for his loss. The death of his son was announced to the king by his eldest grandson, the Duke of Berri, (Louis XVI.,) being introduced into his presence as Monseigneur le Dauphin. This event appeared to rouse the sovereign from his usual apathy. "Poor France!" said he, with a deep sigh, "thou hast now got a king of fifty, and a dauphin of eleven!" And as he cast a sad and troubled look on the child before him, the future woes of his posterity seemed for a while to be revealed to, and to appal, the guilty soul of Louis XV.

Choiseul thought himself fairly consolidated in his power by the death of the dauphin. The king was getting old, and it seemed scarcely probable that he would take another acknowledged mistress. Such was not the wish of the handsome and unprincipled court ladies; who, on the death of Madame de Pompadour, strove to succeed her in the favour of the monarch. Their blandishments were, however, lavished in vain: a common courtesan was destined to succeed the bourgeoise, and to rule over the court of France.

All the sermons that could be preached on the increasing immorality and shamelessness of the times, would never speak so eloquently as the love of Louis XV. for Madame du Barry. The first mistresses of the king had been comparatively modest women: they were highly born, clever, and

educated ladies, who knew how to sin with a proper regard for the bienséances: some of them even possessed high qualities, and strove to make a worthy use of a corrupt power. Madame de Pompadour, a bourgeoise and a parvenue, though she served the passions of the king in an infamous manner, and was deservedly hated for her insolence and tyranny, was still an immaculate woman, if compared to her successor. To the pure and modest beauty of a Madonna, Madame du Barry united the language and manners of a common courtesan. It was this contrast and this licentiousness that fascinated the corrupt heart of Louis XV. Even in the choice of royal mistresses may be traced the descending tendency so characteristic of the times. From the daughters of nobles to the wife of a bourgeoise, and from her again to a woman of the people, the differences were sufficiently striking.

When Madame du Barry was declared the mistress "en titre" of Louis XV., all the high-born ladies—who construed it into an open insult that none of them should have been thought worthy of the place bestowed on her—opposed her favour with violent and bitter hostility. At the head of this party were the Duchess de Grammont and the Princess of Beauvau. Both were former favourites of Madame de Pompadour. Madame de Grammont, a reckless, despotic woman, the sister of Choiseul—over whose mind she possessed great influence—had vainly attempted to succeed Madame de Pompadour in the favour of the king. Exasperated and blinded by her wounded pride, she prevented her brother from accepting the protection Madame du Barry was at first willing to offer. Not satisfied with being, through Choiseul, the arbiter of every important state affair, and the distributor of places and favours, Madame de Grammont urged her brother to use his ascendency over the mind of the king, in order to banish Madame du Barry. As it long remained doubtful which, of the minister or the mistress, would retire vanquished from the contest, Madame de Grammont and the Princess of Beauvau enlisted almost the whole court in their

cause. Whilst the saloons of the Duke of Choiseul and his sister were daily thronged with courtiers, Madame du Barry saw herself almost wholly deserted. The vindictive Madame de Grammont even caused libels to be circulated and songs to be sung against her rival, wherever the royal favourite might go; even at Marly, and in the presence of the king, she was followed with insults. The nobles, through a spirit of caste; the philosophers, because they were protected and encouraged by Choiseul and his sister: the people, from hatred to the royal profligacy,—all took up the cry against Madame du Barry; whose only crime was, that she was fit for the degrading position to which the love of the king had called her.

She patiently endured these insults; and Louis XV., with still greater patience, put no stop to the insolence of M. de Choiseul. The minister became convinced that the king could not dispense with his services. In order to render himself still more necessary to him, he married the young dauphin (Louis XVI.) to Marie Antoinette, the favourite daughter of Maria Theresa; he also hoped by this alliance to give himself a hold on the future sovereigns of France. The chief consideration which kept Louis XV. faithful to his minister so long, was, in fact, his own extreme indolence. Madame du Barry, seeing at last that the warfare waged against her was a deadly one, took up the struggle in good earnest, by attacking the philosophers and the parliaments, and protecting the religious party. Self-preservation rendered her active: she teased the king incessantly to send away Choiseul. Louis XV. still hesitated between his love for his mistress and his value for his minister: the imprudence of Madame de Grammont precipitated the catastrophe. With the secret connivance of her brother, the duchess travelled through France, entering into communications with the chief agitators of the provincial parliaments. Her design, and that of Choiseul, was to establish a powerful link between all the parliaments and that of Paris, and thus, in case of necessity, to renew the times of the league and the Fronde. This was enough to doom both Madame de Grammont and her

brother in the mind of the king. When he saw that, not satisfied with interfering with his pleasure, Choiseul and his audacious sister sought even to rouse the nation against him, Louis XV., yielding to the representations of Madame du Barry, suddenly dismissed the daring minister. M. de Choiseul was sent into exile; in consideration of his amiable wife, the king allowed him to retire to Chanteloup, where he possessed a magnificent residence. Madame de Grammont, banished from the court, became a provincial canoness, and lived in a state of mediocrity, until she ascended the scaffold in the time of the Revolution.

The disgrace of Choiseul was a real triumph, and shewed not only the weakness of royal authority, but the immense progress the philosophic party had made. All that the land held of noble and distinguished flocked around the minister in his exile; and, as though to brave the monarch more openly still, there was erected at Chanteloup a column, on which all the names of the visitors were inscribed, in order to perpetuate the memory of this protest against the personal will of the sovereign. Never was the powerlessness of absolute monarchy more clearly manifested.

Madame du Barry made a moderate use of her triumph. Though so much hated and reviled, she was indifferent to revenge. If she had caused Choiseul to be dismissed, it was because his ruin or hers was necessary. This natural kindness of heart, and the perfect good humour which she always displayed, greatly contributed to fascinate the king. "We must shut up the Bastile; you will send no one to it," he often observed to her. One of Madame du Barry's first acts was to make her lover, the Duke of Aiguillon, minister. It is asserted—on somewhat doubtful authority, indeed, but the temper of Louis XV. renders the fact probable—that Madame du Barry ordered D'Aiguillon to go and thank the king for the foreign ministry, though it had never been given to him; and that, with his usual apathy, Louis XV. submitted to the will of his mistress, and allowed D'Aiguillon to enter on the duties of the office she had thus bestowed on him of her own authority.

The political power of Madame du Barry led to what had been the constant aim of monarchy since Louis XIV., the suppression of the parliaments. This coup d'état, the work of a capricious favourite and of her lover,—for it was D'Aiguillon, who, whilst governor of Brittany, had rendered himself so notorious in the affairs of La Chalotais,—did not produce a very deep or real effect on the philosophic power of society. The parliaments represented Jansenism: there was no real sympathy between them and the philosophers; who looked upon them as an old and worn-out form of opposition, and whose aim was far more bold and destructive. The influence of Madame du Barry was extremely slight. On society at large she had no power: nor, indeed, did she seek to exercise any. Her own conversation was free from wit or delicacy: it was bold, and even licentious. At court, Madame du Barry exercised, however, some power. The opposition which had been raised as long as Choiseul was in authority, ceased when the power of the royal favourite was fully consolidated. The most noble names in the land were, ultimately, inscribed at the door of Madame du Barry, as they had formerly been inscribed on the column of Chanteloup. It was on these persons that the freedom of speech of Madame du Barry—a freedom in which the king evidently took pleasure—reacted. In order to win a few favours, and pay their court to the monarch, Richelieu and other old courtiers entered, as they said themselves, on the ways of perdition, and relinquished that elegant phraseology, for which they had been remarkable so long, in order to adopt the language which Madame du Barry had picked up among abandoned women and chevaliers d'industrie, the companions of her youth.

Though the necessity of her position had made Madame du Barry enter into the views of the devout party—since she opposed the philosophic supporters of Choiseul, whom they naturally disliked—there existed no real sympathy between her and the religious portion of the nation. Never, perhaps, was there so uncompromising a reproof administered, as that which Louis XV. received, in the presence of his favourite and

of the whole court, from the Bishop of Senez; who, when preaching before him, reproached him with the numerous errors of his life, and with that last scandal of all, the favour of Madame du Barry, in terms which might well have made the monarch blush with shame, if shame had not long since ceased to colour that withered cheek.* Notwithstanding the audacity of his reproofs, or perhaps on that very account, this same Bishop of Senez was called upon to preach before the king during the Lent of the year 1774. He chose for one of his texts the words of the Prophet: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" and when the forty days were past, Louis XV. was lying dead in the royal abbey of Saint-Denis.

A sudden attack of the small-pox carried off the guilty king in the sixty-fourth years of his age. As long as there seemed any chance of his recovery, the death-bed of the sick monarch witnessed a struggle as disgraceful as that of Metz. The set of devotees, who had submitted to the degrading protection of Madame du Barry, delayed, as long as decency would allow, the religious rites which must necessarily have caused her removal from court; whilst, on the contrary, the atheistical and philosophic friends of the ex-minister Choiseul, sought by their intrigues to terrify the dying king, and hasten the ceremony that was to ruin Madame du Barry. Religious terror at length prevailed once more over the mind of Louis XV. He ordered D'Aiguillon to take away Madame du Barry; and, after a tender and final adieu to his mistress, he delivered himself over to his confessor. As it was not yet quite certain whether the king would recover or not, several persons of the court thought fit to call on Madame du Barry in her retirement; and, in consequence of this were, for several years afterwards, looked upon with disfavour under the reign of Louis XVI.

When doubt no longer existed with regard to the approaching death of the king, the event was expected with general

* "Qu'il avait été ramasser dans le ruisseau les restes de la corruption publique," was the expression used by the Bishop of Senez.

apathy. Prayers were offered up for him by the clergy in the churches; but few of his subjects joined in these petitions. The poisardes kept their vow: Louis XV. had neither a "Pater" nor an "Ave" from them. With the exception of the partisans of Madame du Barry, none of the courtiers cared to conceal their entire indifference on the subject of the life or death of their sovereign. The neglected daughters of Louis XV. alone had sufficient courage and devotedness to attend on their father; whose loathsome disease, aggravated by a dissolute life, filled all who approached him with horror.

On the 10th of May 1774, the whole court was hourly expecting, in the "œil de bœuf" of the palace of Versailles, the dissolution of the king. The dauphin, and the rest of the royal family, were to leave the palace as soon as Louis XV. should have breathed his last. Everything was in readiness, and one of the few attendants who lingered in the chamber of the dying monarch had placed a lighted taper behind one of the windows, to act as a signal. It was known beforehand, that when that feeble light vanished, Louis XV. would have ceased to exist.

The taper was extinguished. The dauphin was then with his young wife in a remote part of the palace. A sound, like that of loud thunder, was heard: it was the rush of innumerable courtiers, eagerly pressing forward to do homage to the new king. Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette trembled and turned pale. An instinctive and irresistible impulse made them both fall down on their knees: a feeling of dread seemed to usher in for them their most inauspicious reign. With heads humbly bowed, clasped hands, and gushing tears, they exclaimed, in a faltering tone, "Guide us, O God! Protect us! we are called to reign too young."

How often yet, whilst reading the history of that fatal reign, will human wisdom ask, Oh, why did not Heaven hear that prayer?

The Countess of Noailles entered the apartment, and was the first to salute the new sovereigns. All the grand officers of the crown followed in succession. When this duty was

over, Marie Antoinette, leaning on her husband's arm, entered the carriage in waiting, and rode off with the rest of the royal suite. As soon as it was known that the young king and queen were gone, the courtiers deserted the royal palace. Every one now dreaded to stay any longer near the deceased monarch, whose decaying remains exhaled a contagion as foul as the foul corruption of his reign.

A few attendants watched by the corpse, which was placed in a coffin without being embalmed, and conveyed as speedily and privately as possible to Saint-Denis. There it rested; until the people, maddened with hatred, caused by ages of misery, rose in their wrath, and, after immolating the living, spent the last efforts of their vengeance on the senseless dead.

PERIOD THE THIRD.

REIGN OF LOUIS XVI.

CHAPTER I.

LOUIS XVI. AND MARIE ANTOINETTE—THEIR POPULARITY—ILL-FEELING AGAINST THE QUEEN—CHANGE IN THE SPIRIT OF SOCIETY.

THE same warning voice which had so boldly upbraided the vices of Louis XV., calling on the guilty sovereign to repent ere the hour of repentance should have once more gone by, now ushered in the opening reign with accents of prophetic woe.

Jean of Beauvais, Bishop of Senez, was enjoined to preach the funeral sermon of the deceased monarch, whom he had so unsparingly censured in all the pomp and pride of his kingly power. The austere prelate belonged to the strict and uncompromising portion of the French clergy; he fulfilled his arduous task with mournful but courageous severity. The aspect of perishable mortality could not awe him into pitying and treacherous silence, or make him flatter, with lying lips, the many errors of the royal dead. He spared them not: openly alluding to the unpopularity of Louis XV. during the latter years of his reign, he uttered this striking and—for absolute sovereigns—ever-memorable remark: "The people," said he, solemnly, "have not perhaps the right of complaining; but theirs is at least the right of remaining silent. Their silence, then, becomes the lesson of kings."

Whilst pronouncing the funeral oration of Louis XV., the orator seemed to be also lamenting over the dark era of vice and philosophy; which, though born beneath that monarch's sway, was not now, like him, going down to the tomb. The Bishop of Senez addressed the whole eighteenth century in a tone of gloomy foreboding. He acknowledged the intellectual

progress France had made; but he bitterly reproached the age for its impious and profligate philosophy. "We shall have no more superstition," he mournfully observed, "because religion will be extinct; no more false heroism, because honour will have ceased to exist. . . . Behold! ye bold spirits, the ruin caused by your systems! Tremble at your successes, and at a revolution more fatal than the heresies which have changed the aspect of several states around us: for there, at least, men still worship and live virtuously. And shall our unhappy descendants have no faith, no honour, and no God? O holy Gallican Church! O most Christian kingdom! God of our fathers, have mercy on posterity!" Few heeded the warning of the too-clear-sighted bishop, who lived to see the revolution he had foretold.

Voltaire answered the Bishop of Senez's attack on the eighteenth century, in a strain of coarse, personal abuse. He accused him of ingratitude, for having boldly alluded to the vices of Louis XV.; which he, Voltaire, termed *love weaknesses!* With equal effrontery, he declared, that at no other epoch had there been seen so many princesses renowned for their virtue, or so great a number of disinterested and noble-minded ministers. "Never," he proceeds, "have men been happier and more enlightened"—the fruits of this happiness and enlightenment became manifest at the French Revolution—"never has society been more amiable, and animated by stronger feelings of honour. Never, in short, have belles-lettres exercised a greater influence over the manners and feelings of the people!"

The tone of Voltaire's answer to the Bishop of Senez gives a correct idea of the wilful blindness of the philosophers. Surrounded by a general corruption, which they had aided and enlisted in their cause, of which traces might be found in all their works, they had the guilt and folly to deny its very existence. The individuals who shared the gloomy presentments of the Bishop of Senez were, indeed, very few; the mass of the nation hailed with rapture the reign of Louis XVI.: less, however, through love of the new king, than from a feeling of deep hatred for the memory of his pre-

decessor. "I never saw," observes the traveller Swinburne, "joy more visible than it appears to be on the loss of this same Louis le bien-aimé." Without examining from what motive arose the enthusiasm of the people, or what hopes their accession to the throne was doomed to realise or disappoint, the young sovereigns ingenuously rejoiced over their brief and unearned popularity.

The king had then reached his twentieth year. His features were heavy and commonplace, but of a mild and benevolent expression. His person was awkward and ungainly; his manner timid, hesitating, and abrupt. Without being mean or vulgar, his bearing had none of the conscious dignity which becomes the exercise of royal power. It was impossible to behold him and not to feel that the respect he received was paid to rank alone. The character of Louis XVI. corresponded with his personal appearance: pious, kind-hearted, humane, but weak and timid, his virtues were of those which secure affection and esteem, whilst they ever fail to command admiration. His intellect neither rose above nor sank beneath average excellence. He was, however, one of the best geographers in his kingdom, and drew up, with his own hand, the instructions for the expedition of the ill-fated La Pérouse; who attributed them to members of the Academy of Sciences, and was greatly astonished to learn that they emanated from the king. His chief pleasures were hunting and smithwork, in which he excelled; his tastes and feelings were essentially simple and homely: everywhere, save on a throne, he would have been happy and respected; but with all the virtues of a private man, he had none of those that a monarch should possess. The keen, unerring sense that reads through men and men's motives, the skill to avoid needless danger, the daring to brave it, the power and energy that fit a man for strife and victory, were all wanting in Louis XVI. Weak and resistless between his friends and his enemies, always influenced by the last speaker, he never knew how to carry out the plans for reform with which he opened his reign. Of all the high qualities a king should own, he had

but one: the patient and almost sublime endurance of irremediable misfortunes.

The feelings generally inspired by Louis XVI., at the epoch of his accession to the throne, were esteem and hope: these feelings rose into enthusiasm when he appeared in public with his young and lovely wife. From her first entrance into the country over which she was destined to reign, Marie Antoinette had excited, by her grace and beauty, a universal sentiment of admiration. When the chivalrous Duke of Brissac, then governor of Paris, received the young dauphiness in his official rank, his sole harangue was the gallant assurance that, in the crowd around her, she had already made the conquest of two hundred thousand lovers. "Ah! the good people!" both she and the dauphin artlessly exclaimed, as they saw themselves surrounded in the Tuileries by a respectful and loving multitude. Though the dauphiness was then little more than fifteen, she displayed a singular degree of tact and address. On returning from Paris to Versailles, she said to her father-in-law:—"Oh! we have been so kindly received! How much you must be loved!" Thus delicately attributing to the affection felt for the king the sudden popularity, of which he might otherwise have shewn himself jealous. On the evening of her arrival, she supped with the princes, and several court ladies, among whom was Madame du Barry. Louis XV. unblushingly introduced the profligate courtesan to his daughter-in-law. The youthful Marie Antoinette deeply resented this indignity; but, not wishing to testify her anger too openly, she merely asked what was the beautiful Madame du Barry's office at court. "To please and amuse the king," was the courtier-like and ambiguous reply. "Then I shall become her rival," answered the dauphiness, with a smile.

Marie Antoinette was in her nineteenth year at the death of Louis XV. Years had ripened her loveliness, which had still all the bloom and freshness of youth. Graceful and gay, even more than strictly beautiful, she exercised, on all those who approached her, a deep and irresistible fascination. To

the golden hair, the dazzling fairness, and the brilliant complexion of a northern beauty, she united all the grace and animation of the south. Her oval and expressive countenance was rendered remarkably characteristic by the high, clear forehead, delicately-formed aquiline nose, and full Austrian lip, hereditary in her race. The admiration her personal attractions called forth was, however, always tempered by the homage due to her rank. The penetrating glance of her fine blue eyes, the mingled pride and sweetness of her smile, and the striking elegance and dignity of her carriage, whilst they added to the loveliness of the woman, never allowed the beholder to forget the queen. Marie Antoinette had been educated for the express purpose of appearing with the utmost advantage at the court of France. She readily acquired all the tact and frivolous grace necessary to a princess who was destined to reign over the most polished and fastidious nation of Europe, and to mingle with women of unrivalled taste and elegance. But, further than this, the teaching she received did not, unfortunately, extend. In every external matter, she was perfectly accomplished; she failed in those essential points which it is the duty of true education to develop. To a prompt, unreflecting mind, a frivolous and haughty temper, she united a nature full of rash but noble impulses. Though she appeared to have inherited all the determination of her mother, Maria Theresa, she wanted the sagacity and courageous calmness which distinguished the empress-queen. Ardent, generous, and imprudent, Marie Antoinette seemed destined to dazzle for a moment the court over which she doubly reigned, as woman and as queen; to share and embitter her husband's fatal destiny; and to shed around the story of his reign the melancholy charm of her beauty, heroism, and misfortunes.

No signs of this gloomy future were yet visible. The horizon was one of unclouded serenity. None of those who crowded around the loved and admired queen of France could foresee the dark prison-house that was to replace her brilliant court, or the scaffold which closed her brief and sad career.

But, even at that epoch of universal hope and joy, many were those who beheld, with secret disaffection, the daughter of Maria Theresa seated on the throne of France. From the opening of her reign, a party, inimical to the young queen and the Austrian alliance, watched with hostile glance every imprudence of Marie Antoinette. It has been mentioned, in the preceding pages, that Choiseul, in order to preserve himself in his position of prime minister, after the death of Madame de Pompadour, had married the dauphin to a princess of Austria. This union was, at the time, viewed with displeasure by the greatest portion of the nation. France had been for too many centuries at war with Austria, and the alliance concluded with that power through Madame de Pompadour was too thoroughly hateful for the marriage of the heir to the crown with Marie Antoinette not to be generally viewed with disfavour. The superstitiously-inclined did not fail to notice the many fatal omens which had ushered in this unhappy union. A mysterious and melancholy fate had, they said, been predicted, during her youth, to the favourite daughter of Maria Theresa. She left Vienna amidst the mourning of the whole people, and images of grief and horror greeted her on her arrival in France. The pavilion prepared for her at Strasburg was hung with tapestries representing Medea still covered with the blood of her children, and the hapless Creusa writhing in the agonies of death. A terrific storm burst forth on her marriage day; and the splendid fireworks given on the Place Louis XV., in honour of her nuptials with the dauphin, cost the lives of several hundred persons, who perished on the same fatal spot where both she and her husband were afterwards to suffer. Marie Antoinette probably thought little of these incidents: so far, at least, as their relation to the future was concerned; but there were others who treasured up these circumstances in their hearts, and dwelt upon them with superstitious dread.

Apart even from the prejudice her Austrian birth raised against her, the young dauphiness was so unfortunate, on her arrival in France, as to make numerous enemies, on a ridicu-

lous point of etiquette. Maria Theresa had requested of Louis XV., that her daughter's cousin, Mademoiselle de Lorraine, might dance a minuet at the marriage-ball, immediately after the princes and princesses of the royal family. The French duchesses opposed this in the most vehement manner, declaring that they recognised no intervening rank between themselves and the princes of the blood, and that if Mademoiselle de Lorraine were allowed to dance her minuet, to the detriment of their privileges, all the court ladies would abstain from appearing at the ball. Louis XV. vainly asked them, as a personal favour, to waive their right for once: they inexorably refused. The dauphiness was greatly offended at their obstinacy. Having procured one of the letters which Louis XV. had addressed on this subject to his rebellious aristocracy, she put it away carefully, and wrote on the margin, "*Je m'en souviendrai.*"

From this apparently trifling matter sprang that vague and mutual feeling of mistrust which always existed between Marie Antoinette and the high court nobility. This feeling was increased by the resentment the queen felt for the comparative neglect with which she had been treated until her husband's accession to the throne.

Madame du Barry was all powerful during the latter years of Louis XV.'s reign. Whilst *she* was surrounded by assiduous courtiers, the proud young dauphiness was scarcely allowed to share that general influence of which women are often more jealous than of the substantial realities of power. An unacknowledged struggle was incessantly carried on between the dauphin's wife and the king's mistress. Madame du Barry protected the retrograde party, and Marie Antoinette gave what little power she possessed to the Duke of Choiseul and the philosophers: the very men whose imprudence was preparing the Revolution.

Although she was too haughty to shew how deeply the slights of the courtiers had wounded her, Marie Antoinette never forgot them; and perhaps manifested her resentment and contempt too openly, when she received, as queen of

France, the homage hitherto paid to Madame du Barry. This conduct did not tend to pacify the anti-Austrian party, who soon began to spread rumours injurious to the young sovereign. Her light-heartedness and love of pleasure were insidiously construed into a tendency to satire, and a wish for guilty and forbidden amusements. One of the most innocent errors of Marie Antoinette—her disregard of etiquette—proved, however, very fatal. The ancient customs of the land fettered the sovereigns with numerous and tedious usages, which had the advantage of not allowing a shadow of reproach to rest on the name of the monarch's spouse. It was felt that, like Cæsar's wife, she should not even be suspected. Confiding and inexperienced, the queen, who disliked restraint, hastened to free herself from the constant surveillance exercised upon her by her titled attendants. She thus merely complied with the independent spirit of the age; but this freedom of conduct subjected her to grievous misinterpretations. A queen who could walk out without hoops, and who, in her retreat of Trianon, actually requested all the guests to be seated in her presence, was indignantly pronounced—by the virtuous dowagers of the court of Louis XV.—capable of any impropriety. It is a fact beyond doubt, that the infamous calumnies against the queen, and of which the traces are not yet wholly effaced in France, first originated amongst the nobility.

With the recklessness which always characterised her, Marie Antoinette did little to conciliate the nobles of her court. She had not forgotten their subserviency to Madame du Barry, or their conduct towards Mademoiselle de Lorraine at the epoch of her marriage; and she both laughed at and despised their aristocratic pretensions: well knowing that scarcely even one amongst the highest families was free from the stain of some financial mesalliance. This latter consideration induced the queen not to consult merely high birth in the gift of those places and favours which were at her disposal, but to be guided chiefly by her own personal feelings and affections. The great families, who looked on all the posts at court as theirs by right, were profoundly irritated to see them bestowed

on those persons whom the queen's friendship had alone raised from obscurity. Marie Antoinette cared little for their discontent; policy was never her favourite virtue: she did not see the necessity of sacrificing her own inclinations to those whom she had been accustomed to consider as mere dependants on royalty; and she was still less disposed to fetter her freedom with the dull and wearisome routine of etiquette.

Her tastes were naturally simple: a solitary walk in the wild and shady gardens of her favourite Trianon delighted her more than all the stately magnificence of Versailles, with its terraces, broad avenues, and sculptured marble fountains. Marie Antoinette often displayed the natural kindness of her heart in these lonely promenades. None ever implored her pity in vain: she indiscriminately relieved the wretched beings who sought her assistance. Her benevolence had all the sincerity and indiscretion of youth. Although these morning excursions were perfectly innocent, the queen trusted too exclusively to the love and esteem of the people as her safeguard against calumny. Her generous nature deceived her with respect to the real worth of popularity. Heedless of the future, she welcomed royalty as a glorious vision, fraught with happiness and joy. Time alone shewed her that even the bright diadem she wore might in the end become a sharp and heavy crown of thorns.

The example of the queen, though generally reproved, was almost universally followed. The fashions daily became more simple, and less of the old ostentatious formality marked social intercourse. Since the death of Louis XIV., the rigid etiquette of former times had gradually decreased. Nothing was so calculated to banish it entirely as the growing importance given to assemblies: it is when men meet seldom that a feeling of jealous restraint marks their intercourse. As the eighteenth century progressed and drew to a close, that ardent desire of equality and freedom, which ultimately broke forth in a sanguinary revolution, induced those persons who then composed good society to indulge in all the liberty consistent with their habits. Although a great degree of independence already

prevailed, yet, in order to render it more extensive still, the mistresses of the most fashionable houses of Paris disposed their drawing-rooms as *cafés*, with separate tables, refreshments, cards, and newspapers, for the convenience of the guests; who were almost as free from restraint as if they had really been in a place of public resort. When the queen admitted men at her table—an innovation till then unheard of—the etiquette of ordinary life naturally relaxed its severity. A more moral and democratic tone seemed to pervade every class of society; individual merit openly took its legitimate rank; the bourgeoisie adopted a more confidant bearing, and the nobles a tone of greater complaisance: the barriers of prejudice and station daily yielded to the increasing desire of equality.

Though Louis XVI. did not at first feel for the queen that passionate attachment with which she afterwards inspired him, his moral and religious feelings inclined him towards a calm domestic life; of which he felt that it was his duty to give the first example. Whilst the court was still in mourning for his grandfather, the king, who could not then indulge in hunting, took long matrimonial walks with the queen, in those gardens of Choisy where Louis XV. had formerly attended the beautiful Madame de Chateauroux. On the day following the first of these promenades, several worthy couples, little remarkable for conjugal affection, took pattern of the royal pair, and had the courage to walk arm-in-arm together for several hours. This was considered a heroic instance of the power of flattery. Though decency is not virtue, it has still some value. If the court of Louis XVI. was not in reality more moral than that of his predecessor, it was by far more respectable and decorous. The novels of Voisenon and Crébillon were no longer read openly, and even the name of Voltaire could not shield from blame the licentiousness of some of his productions.

The reign of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI. may thus be said to have ushered in a remarkable change in the history of French social life. Previously to the death of Louis XV. the spirit of philosophy had already undergone some modi-

fications. After being gross and licentious under the regency, exact, ironical, and reasoning, in the middle of the century, it now assumed a sentimental and levelling tendency, which contrasted with the sensual and aristocratic doctrines of Voltaire. The aspect which society presented was in accordance with the spirit of the authors in fashion. The enthusiastic Rousseau, the grave and domestic Richardson, the sentimental Sterne, the pastoral Gessner, his disciple, Florian, St Pierre, the author of "Paul and Virginia," had replaced the cold sceptics of preceding years. Philosophy now assumed a wholly different tendency. Vague desires for the general progress of humanity, undefined aspirations towards excellence, and exaggerated manifestations of feeling (which were ironically stigmatised by the name of *sensiblerie*) began to characterise French society.

In the environs of Paris, and in several of the provinces, moral festivals were established. Prizes were given to the most exemplary young girls, to pious children, and to kind mothers.—A prize for maternal kindness! Good actions and useful labours were also rewarded. In one place La Fête des Bonnes Gens was enthusiastically celebrated. In another, La Fête des Bonnes Mœurs (pure morals!) was held with much applause.

Such festivals and ceremonies might, perhaps, have been natural and appropriate in a pure and primitive social state; though it is likely that in such a state they would not have been thought of; but in France, in the eighteenth century, in the very centre of a corrupt and decaying world, they were only hollow vanities—a mere philosophical varnish, too transparent to hide the foul corruption which lay beneath this fair seeming of virtue. This affectation of external show, so well named "emphase philosophique," was essentially opposed to the pure internal morality of Christianity. In this distinction between meretricious ornaments and austere beauty lay the difference of the two systems.

Madame Riccoboni, a clever authoress of the period, detected, with her usual tact, the ridiculous aspect of this new

mania. "What!" she petulantly observed, "cannot an author now write ten lines without exclaiming, 'O goodness!' 'O benevolence!' 'O humanity!' 'O virtue!'" There was, unfortunately, too much of the specious morality of Rousseau in this display of refined and elevated feeling. Because men spoke with rapturous enthusiasm of virtues they never practised, they thought themselves virtuous. Dissipated and ambitious women gravely discussed the charms of a calm, retired life, and dwelt with emphasis on the pure pleasures of platonic love. But even in this exaggerated philanthropy there was much that was good and true. The doctrines of love and equality on which it rested were derived from Christianity; and, although the philosophers marred their beautiful and primitive simplicity by an inflated and declamatory enthusiasm, they could not destroy the serene loveliness of the divine original. This "sensibleric," however ridiculous it may have been, was only the weak side of a very important change in the feelings and opinions of the French people. According to another observation of the keen-sighted Madame Riccoboni, depth had now become the folly of a nation once celebrated for its graceful frivolousness. The example of England had greatly contributed to this change. Both men and women began to ask themselves if there were no higher object in life than mere pleasure. Court intrigues, and the adventures of profligate nobles, no longer engrossed exclusively every conversation. The declamations of Rousseau, and the pastorals of Florian, gave fashionable people a taste for the country, which displayed itself in imitations of English cottage life, and in such fanciful "bergeries" as that of Trianon, where Marie Antoinette, her husband, and a few chosen friends, assumed the character of peasants, and endeavoured to feel as happy as the humble beings they represented.

Florian was popular, but the favourite writer of this epoch appears to have been the novelist Richardson: "That sublime genius," as Diderot enthusiastically called him. When questioned once concerning his own affairs, the French philosopher could only answer by broken exclamations of, "O Pamela!

O Clarissa! My friends! O Richardson!" This spirit was carried by the women to an extravagant height. Madame de Tessé, on being shewn by Richardson's son-in-law the grave of her favourite author, in Saint Bride's church, knelt down on the hallowed spot, and there shed such an abundance of tears, that her guide thought she must certainly faint away from excess of emotion. The sober citizen was no little alarmed at her extraordinary behaviour, and henceforth shewed himself somewhat reluctant to exhibit the tomb of his deceased relative to French ladies of such exquisite feelings. The fashionable foibles naturally took the tone of this extreme sensitiveness. Geometry and *bel esprit* were almost out of date. Ladies were now afflicted with mysterious diseases springing from the delicacy of their nature. Vapours, and fainting fits returning at stated periods, became the prevalent complaints, whilst plays of the most tender and lachrymose cast had alone the power of pleasing the public.

A republican feeling accompanied, however, this philanthropic reaction. The fashions took a Grecian aspect, and antiquity was now less studied for its literary resources than for its political characteristics. Art fashioned itself according to the prevailing mood. The days when Watteau and Boucher interpreted the poetry of Chaulieu, Bernis, and Gentil Bernard by voluptuous paintings, were past. Greuze now painted pictures in the style of La Chaussée's plaintive comedies, whilst the academical vein prepared the young David to be the painter of the Revolution. This admiration of republican principles was first professed by the nobles. It was they who applauded in the palace of Versailles the "Brutus" of Voltaire, acted in the presence and by the commend of royalty. These two lines,

> "Je suis fils de Brutus, et je porte en mon cœur
> La liberté gravée, et les rois en horreur,"

were received with enthusiastic acclamations. The imprudent and inconsistent admirers of republican freedom were the same nobles who, after aiding and encouraging the Revolution,

turned from it as soon as it seemed likely to injure their privileges; and who, under the name ef émigrés, armed all Europe against a republic which partly owed its existence to their efforts.

In this, however, as well as in many other points, the nobles are scarcely to be considered free agents. Carried down the tide of opinion by the irresistible impulse of their age, they never rightly understood the stern task they were fated to accomplish. It is seldom that the ideas destined to benefit the people are first called forth, or even propagated, by them. The philosophy of the eighteenth century was essentially aristocratic in its origin. From princes to nobles, from nobles to financiers, from these to bourgeois, and from the bourgeoisie to the people, the new doctrines slowly descended in ever-widening circles, until the last broad ring of all embraced the whole nation. And then, but not till then, did thoughts shape themselves into deeds.

This gradual descent was very visible: it ought to have been equally significant. A traveller returned to France under the reign of Louis XVI., after having been several years away: he was asked what change he found in Paris since his former stay,—"Nothing," answered he, "save that they are now saying in the streets what was formerly said in the drawing-rooms."

The traveller was right: "philosophy" had gone down to the people. It had shattered moral and religious feelings, in the minds of those whom such feelings alone could render patient under the weight of their misery. In a deep and thrilling voice it had told the injured of their rights as men: it had reminded them of their many galling wrongs. Habit still made them suffer in silence, but the seed of future vengeance was sown.

CHAPTER II.

DECLINE OF THE BUREAUX D'ESPRIT — MARÉCHALE DE LUXEMBOURG — MADAME DE BEAUHARNAIS — MADAME NECKER—GERMAINE NECKER.

THE remarkable change indicated in the preceding chapter as having taken place in French society had not yet caused it to forego its exquisitely-polished elegance. The rule of woman over this artificial world was, however, now passing rapidly away.

Madame Geoffrin and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse died in the earlier portion of the reign of Louis XVI., and no ladies of equal tact or talent were found to seize on the power they thus left vacant. Old, blind, ill-tempered Madame du Deffand still remained; but she, alas, now uttered many querulous complaints concerning neglect and ingratitude of friends, who all abandoned her in her old age. Bent double with years, her quick intellect unimpaired, her memory still stored with tales of the regency, and many a scandalous anecdote of the days of Louis XV., she stood amid the new generation, sightless and alone, a withered relic of the past. How strangely must she—so frankly selfish and inexorably real—have wondered at all the strains of high-flown sentiment and lofty philanthropy which suddenly broke forth upon her ear. Well might she also feel chagrined to note how her own caustic wit, though still keen and brilliant as ever, had lost its wonted power to dazzle and attract. Poor woman! she had outlived her day. Light, epicurean philosophy, satirical wit, late suppers and good cheer, had vanished before fine feeling, pastoral lore, and primitive simplicity of manners. Suppers were almost immoral, now that the golden age was to return,

brought back to earth by the "contrat social," and that poor suffering humanity was to be regenerated without toil or woe.

Like all those who resorted to Paris for amusement, Walpole noticed this alteration with evident displeasure. "They may be growing wiser," he pettishly observes, "but the intermediate change is dulness." The era for bureaux d'esprit was, however, gone beyond recall. Philosophy, indeed, no longer sought the aid of their fostering care; it did not even need them as those central points whence it formerly disseminated its doctrines far and wide. The whole spirit of the nation had become philosophic; every drawing-room was now a fit arena. It thus happened that when the three great bureaux d'esprit had ceased to exist, no effort was made to replace them. That such assemblies would be as needless now as they had formerly been useful, seemed to be felt almost by intuition. New wants, new feelings had arisen. Like many prouder institutions, as soon as their appointed task of good or evil was fulfilled, the bureaux d'esprit were forgotten; and their sentimental successors now spoke of them as slightingly as they had probably spoken of the soirées of the Hôtel Rambouillet and the *ruelles* * of the seventeenth century.

The passion for sentiment and "bergerie" was, indeed, carried to strange lengths. The Duchess of Mazarin, a fair and florid dame, more remarkable for good temper than for tact or wit, indulged her pastoral tendencies to an extravagant degree. She once resolved to give, in the heart of winter, a fête that should eclipse everything of the kind yet known. She fitted up her vast saloon in a style of extraordinary splendour, with wide looking-glasses that reached from the floor to the ceiling. At the further extremity of the apartment, a wide recess, separated from it by a glass casement,

* The *précieuses* of the seventeenth century generally received their morning visitors before they had risen. Their guests were thus invited to take seats in the *ruelle*, or space extending between the bed-side and the wall, and which was sufficiently wide to accommodate several persons. From this circumstance a morning conversazione became known under the name of *ruel'e*.

was beautifully decorated with shrubs and flowers so as to represent a lonely bower. Along a winding path, a pretty actress from the opera, attired as a shepherdess, was to appear, with dog and crook, leading a flock of snowy sheep, to the sound of soft, pastoral melody. The light of the lamps, and the surrounding draperies, had been judiciously disposed so as to heighten the effect of this little scene, with which the dancers were to be suddenly surprised at the most interesting moment of the ball. The poor Duchess of Mazarin was all impatience until that auspicious moment should arrive; but before she could give the signal that was to summon the shepherdess and her flock, a most unfortunate accident occurred. The sheep suddenly broke forth from their place of confinement, and burst through the glass casement into the ball-room. Panic-struck with the novel sight, and especially with the glare of innumerable lights, reflected in the large mirrors, they rushed in every direction, knocked down dancers, trampled furiously over them, and attacked all the looking-glasses with desperate energy. Ladies screamed and fainted away; whilst the disconsolate Duchess of Mazarin looked on the whole scene of havoc and confusion with unutterable chagrin.

This untoward incident amused Paris for a whole week, but cured no one of pastoral longings. It was discussed with little mercy in the circle of the old Maréchale de Luxembourg, the friend of Madame du Deffand—like her, the sceptical derider of affected feeling, and, though opposed to the prevailing whim, one of the reigning oracles of wit and bon ton. If social academies had lost their once extensive power, the influence of woman was still widely felt in all matters connected with politeness and good-breeding—matters of which she was, indeed, the sole acknowledged judge. From this source sprang the power of the Maréchale, a very agreeable old woman, of aristocratic and elegant manners. She had been a beauty in her youth, when her numerous adventures formed the theme of many a satirical couplet. Though now grown timorous and devout, she occasionally amused herself

with singing over, in a thin quavering voice, those *noëls* as antiquated as her charms. But, whilst she carefully remembered all the verses that spoke of her departed beauty, she omitted the less flattering comments on her virtue, with the declaration—"that her memory was failing her, and that at her age one began to forget all about those things."

Walpole, who found no one truly fascinating save Madame du Deffand, probably because she admired him extravagantly, speaks thus of the Maréchale de Luxembourg: "She has been very handsome, very abandoned, and very mischievous. Her beauty is gone, her lovers are gone, and she thinks the devil is coming. This dejection has softened her into being rather agreeable, for she has wit and good breeding; but you would swear by the restlessness of her person, and the horrors she cannot conceal, that she had signed the compact, and expected to be called upon in a week for the performance." The fastidious Rousseau judged her differently. The reputation of her caustic wit had prepared him for an epigrammatic, overbearing woman; whereas, on beholding her for the first time, he was not less charmed by the unaffected grace and seducing gentleness of her manners, than by the keenness and delicacy of her tact. The prudent old Maréchale knew very well with whom to be satirical: she did not deal out her arrows right and left, needlessly making herself enemies, like her splenetic friend, Madame du Deffand; to whom she, however, remained faithful, notwithstanding her ill-temper, carefully nursing her in her last illness, and assiduously playing loto with Madame de Choiseul by the bedside of the dying woman.*

Madame de Luxembourg knew how to choose her victims; amongst these was the unlucky Duchess of Mazarin, whose pastoral tendencies, want of tact, full, luxuriant figure, and complexion somewhat too rich and blooming, found no mercy in her sight. "You cannot, however, deny that her colour is beautifully fresh," some one once observed to the Maréchale. "Yes," she impatiently replied, "as fresh as butcher's meat."

* See page 176.

The Maréchale had been one of the most delicate beauties of the court of Louis XV. This crude and pitiless comparison, which happened to be strikingly correct, joined to the adventure of the terrified flock, nearly drove Madame de Mazarin to despair.

Madame de Luxembourg did not, however, indulge frequently in satire or gossip: these are vulgar amusements, and she held a school of good breeding. Nor did she think herself justified in being too rigorous; for she knew that, with one word of censure, she could exclude whomsoever she chose from the established pale of propriety and good taste. Her decisions on those matters were without appeal. In consequence of this high reputation, the old Maréchale might generally be seen surrounded by a wide circle of the young noblesse of both sexes, who listened to her attentively, modelled their speech and manners on her example, and carefully treasured her precepts. Her charming granddaughter generally appeared near her, as the living testimony of the admirable education an unscrupulous woman of the world could give in her penitent old age. The Countess Amélie, as she was generally called, was one of those rare beings who seem too bewitching not to be universally admired, and too good and gentle not to be still more loved. Young, wealthy, and high born, exquisitely beautiful, pious and pure as an angel, lenient to the follies of the world, and towards herself rigidly severe, the charm of her nature was such as to enable her to dispense with the wit and brilliancy which were then considered absolutely necessary for an accomplished woman. Without seeking to dazzle, she attracted universally. Few women of her time inspired so great a number of romantic and passionate attachments: her husband, the worthless Duke of Lauzun, alone remained indifferent to her virtues and beauty. She charmed even her own sex. Many women conceived for her an enthusiastic admiration which shewed how far they thought her removed, in her excellence, beyond the reach of emulation or jealousy. A portrait of the Countess Amélie, by the calm Madame Necker,

would make this account appear cold and tame in comparison with the glowing eulogy bestowed upon her by the methodical and reasoning Genevese. Nature had done much for this charming woman, but it was also acknowledged that she owed far more to the studious care with which she had been reared by her grandmother. It was from the Maréchale de Luxembourg that she had derived the indescribable grace of manner which rendered her so truly fascinating: she was, however, far more simple than her old relative, who carried, to a singular degree, her love of studied elegance. Notwithstanding her extreme devotion, which increased as she advanced in years, the Maréchale is said to have had little faith in the efficacy of prayers that did not happen to prove models of style and taste; and to have candidly believed, in her aristocratic pride, that elegance of language could not fail, as well as sincerity of heart, from being acceptable to the Supreme Being.

Thus, notwithstanding the visible decline of female influence, society still preserved its exquisite polish. Discussions and earnest conversations were seldom allowed; they were considered as leading to exclusiveness and ennui. To pass from one subject to another with tact and frivolous ease, was the most essential point of conversational good breeding. This excessive elegance produced in the end great monotony: all individuality was destroyed; originality of thought or feeling became almost a reproach; and social intercourse, instead of consisting in the exchange of spontaneous feeling, assumed a tone of dull and tedious sameness.

Many novel ideas emerged from this antiquated background, but the new path which was to lead to a revolution in social manners, though already struck, was, as yet, scarcely trod upon. Almost all the old frivolousness remained: many ladies had no graver occupation than *parfilage*, which consisted in unravelling the gold from the silk thread in the rich lace then worn by men of rank. The women solicited, for this purpose, the old lace of the cast-off clothes belonging to their male friends; and, in their eagerness, they often cut off

and seized upon that which was new. This fashion was carried to such an extent that the presents offered to ladies on New-Year's Day consisted almost exclusively of toys made of gold thread, and all destined to be unravelled. This zeal in favour of *parfilage* was not wholly disinterested. The gold, when separated from the silk, was always sold, and it was calculated that a clever *parfileuse* could earn about a hundred *louis* a year by this lucrative amusement. All the women were not, however, so frivolously engaged, and a few still opened their saloons to philosophy. The elegant Duchess of Brancas and Madame Fanny de Beauharnais, the poetess, shared (at an infinite distance, it is true) the empire of the Maréchale de Luxembourg.

Madame Fanny de Beauharnais, the aunt of Joséphine's first husband, was a lady of fashion, who seemed attended by the same ill-fortune that persecuted the Duchess of Mazarin. All her efforts at notoriety either failed or ended most unpleasantly. She began by opening a bureau d'esprit, destined to rival that of Madame Geoffrin; but the philosophers and encyclopédists refused to abandon their old friend, and Madame de Beauharnais was obliged to receive second-rate authors, with Dorat, the poet, at their head. She next took to writing indifferent poetry, which she most unadvisedly published. This was a very unfortunate step. The men who gathered willingly around a clever woman of the world cared very little for an authoress, who might eclipse their own reputation, and who would, at least, exact a degree of flattery and praise they came to receive and not to bestow. These reasons rendered the soirées of Madame de Beauharnais almost as dull as those of her friend and sister poetess, Madame du Bocage. In the year 1773, Madame de Beauharnais published a little work, entitled "A Tous les Penseurs, Salut!" in which she undertook the defence of female authorship. In an age when women ruled everything, from state affairs down to fashionable trifles, this was, however, considered a strange instance of audacity. The bitter and satirical poet, Lebrun, answered Madame de Beauharnais in a strain of keen sarcasm. "Ink,"

said he, "ill becomes rosy fingers." Dorat was accused of composing his friend's poetry; there is no proof that the accusation was founded on truth, but it served to prompt Lebrun with the following clever epigram :—

"La belle Eglé, dit-on, a deux petits travers:
Elle fait son visage, et ne fait pas ses vers."

It was not true, however, that Madame de Beauharnais made her face. Lebrun had never seen her when he wrote this; he met her afterwards, and admired both her graceful person and her agreeable manners. This did not prevent him, however, from still directing against her some of his keenest epigrams. Madame de Beauharnais, weary of the unequal contest, retired at length from Paris, which had been rendered odious to her by repeated mortifications.

The wife of the minister, Necker, possessed a more real and serious power.

Madame Necker was a religious, pure-minded woman, with principles of rigid austerity. Learned, methodical, with a touch of the puritanism of Geneva in her tone and feelings; in manner calm and grave, she looked a severe and statue-like figure amidst the gay and graceful Frenchwomen of the period. She was a native of Geneva, and the daughter of M. Curchod, a Protestant pastor, residing in the vicinity of Lausanne. Her father gave her the severe and classical education which is usually bestowed on men alone, and the young Suzanne Curchod was renowned throughout the whole province for her wit, beauty, and erudition. Gibbon, the future historian, but then an unknown youth studying in Lausanne, met Mademoiselle Curchod, fell in love with her, and succeeded in rendering his attachment acceptable to both the object of his affections and her parents. When he returned, however, to England, his father indignantly refused to hear of the proposed marriage between him and the Swiss minister's portionless daughter. Gibbon yielded to parental authority, and philosophically forgot his learned mistress. After her father's death, which left her wholly unprovided for, Suzanne

Curchod retired with her mother to Geneva. She there earned a precarious subsistance by teaching persons of her own sex. When her mother died, a lady named Madame de Vermenoux induced Mademoiselle Curchod to come to Paris, in order to teach Latin to her son. It was in this lady's house that she met Necker. He was then in the employment of Thélusson the banker, and occasionally visited Madame de Vermenoux. Struck with the noble character and grave beauty of the young governess, Necker cultivated her acquaintance, and ultimately made her his wife. Mutual poverty had delayed their marriage for several years; but it was not long ere Necker rose from his obscurity. Madame Necker had an ardent love of honourable distinction, which she imparted to her husband, and which greatly served to quicken his efforts; his high talents in financial matters were at length recognised: he became a wealthy and respected man. Shortly after her marriage, Madame Necker expressed the desire of devoting herself to literature. Her husband, however, delicately intimated to her that he should regret seeing her adopt such a course. This sufficed to induce her to relinquish her intention: she loved him so entirely, that, without effort or repining, she could make his least wish her law.

Madame Necker soon perceived the power of woman in French society. With her talents, and the wealth at her command, she saw how easily she could acquire an influence which might be highly advantageous to her husband. Long before Necker was called to office in 1776, his wife had, therefore, opened her house to Marmontel, Saint-Lambert, the Princess of Monaco, Thomas, Guibert, the Countess Amélie, Madame de Grammont, Buffon, Madame d'Angivilliers—formerly Madame du Marchais—La Harpe, Grimm, Raynal, and all the members of the philosophic body. Though she partly succeeded in her object of thus adding to her husband's increasing popularity, Madame Necker wholly mistook her vocation when she endeavoured to shine beyond the quiet circle of domestic privacy. Notwithstanding her long residence in France, she could never divest herself entirely of the

primitive austerity imbibed with her early education. Her learning, her method, her rigid morality, and strict piety, unfitted her for the part she had chosen; which only required a light, brilliant wit, and graceful ease of manner. The truthfulness, and even the simplicity, of her pure nature, secured the respect and esteem of her guests; but they all felt that she failed in that power of pleasing, then far more highly valued than the most sterling qualities. Her brilliant complexion, intelligent features, and fine figure, only elicited cold admiration. Even her friends could not forgive her dancing so awkwardly, dressing with so little taste, and, above all, wanting the charm of that all-pervading grace which had rendered the plain Mademoiselle de Lespinasse attractive, and almost beautiful. They found her bearing formal and constrained; her language too cold and stately. In vain she drew around her men of talent and agreeable women; in vain she paid the most sedulous attention to her guests, and exerted herself to please them: there seemed, in all she said or did, something to be wanting still. The severity of her religious principles, and the freedom with which she manifested them, somewhat annoyed and restrained her philosophic guests. They felt also (what her polite hospitality could never wholly conceal) that the pleasure she found in their company was not the chief object for which she drew them around her. To procure her husband a pleasing relaxation, and to advance him in life, were her real intentions in opening her house to the philosophers; and she unfortunately allowed this to be rather too clearly perceived. The honest but pompous Necker did not interfere with his wife's literary society. He was always present, but spoke little, and allowed every one else to talk for his amusement. The task of directing the conversation he left to Madame Necker. Her solid and serious mind was little adapted for this responsibility. It has been said that she often prepared her evening conversations beforehand: she certainly wanted that spontaneousness which gives to social intercourse its greatest charm. But the capital error of Madame Necker, in the eyes of the philosophers, was that,

either through mismanagement or economy, she failed in providing them with good cheer. Grimm feelingly complained of her cook, who was no doubt vastly inferior to that of Baron d'Holbach, the celebrated maître d'hôtel of philosophy.

Though Madame Necker's Friday dinners were too stiffly solemn, and very indifferent in a gastronomic point of view, the growing importance of her husband, and her own real, if not very brilliant, merit, caused them, in spite of the touch of ennui they imparted, to be well attended. Her worldly position, as the wife of a wealthy banker, was one of great influence. It was Madame Necker who first conceived, in the year 1770, the idea of erecting, by the subscriptions of literary men, a statue to Voltaire. Subscriptions soon poured in: Rousseau, to Voltaire's infinite annoyance, sent his subscription of three louis; and the sculptor Pigalle was despatched to take a model of the favoured French poet. When, a few years later, Gibbon visited Paris, he found his Mademoiselle Curchod on a level with those ladies who then gave the tone to foreign courts and Parisian society. She received her former admirer with a cordial unembarrassed manner, which shewed that, if his infidelity had ever inspired her with any resentment, the feeling had long since subsided and yielded to entire indifference. Gibbon, forgetting that years had not improved his personal appearance—he was very short, and had grown enormously stout—was not a little nettled to perceive that Necker, no wise jealous of his wife's first lover, did not scruple to leave them alone together, whilst he comfortably retired to rest. Necker, however, very highly prized Gibbon's conversation, and subsequently visited him in England, accompanied by his wife.

As Necker rose in the world, Madame Necker's influence increased; but it never was an individual power, like that of Madame du Deffand, or of the Maréchale de Luxembourg. Over her husband she always possessed great influence. Her virtues and noble character had inspired him with a feeling akin to veneration. He was not wholly guided by her counsels, but he respected her opinions as those of a high-minded

being, whom all the surrounding folly and corruption could not draw down from her sphere of holy purity. If Madame Necker was loved and esteemed by her husband, she may be said to have almost idolised him; and her passionate attachment probably increased the feelings of vanity and self-importance of which Necker has often been accused. This exclusive devotedness caused some wonder amongst the friends of the minister and his wife; for seldom had these sceptical philosophers witnessed a conjugal union so strict and uncompromising, and yet so touching in its very severity.

When Necker became, in 1776, Director-General of the Finances, his wife resolved that the influence her husband's official position gave her should not be employed in procuring unmerited favours for flatterers or parasites. She placed before herself the far more noble object of alleviating misfortune, and pointing out to her reforming husband some of the innumerable abuses which then existed in every department of the state. One of her first attempts was to overthrow the lottery. She pressed the point on Necker's attention; but, though he shared her convictions, he had not the power of destroying this great evil: he did, however, all he could to moderate its excesses. The prisons and hospitals of Paris greatly occupied the attention of Madame Necker during the five years of her husband's power. Her devotedness to the cause of humanity was admirable, and shone with double lustre amidst the heartless selfishness of the surrounding world. She once happened to learn that a certain Count of Lautrec had been imprisoned in a dungeon of the fortress of Ham for twenty-eight years! and that the unhappy captive now scarcely seemed to belong to human-kind. A feeling of deep compassion seized her heart. To liberate a state prisoner was more than her influence could command, but she resolved to lighten, if possible, his load of misery. She set out for Ham, and succeeded in obtaining a sight of M. de Lautrec. She found a miserable-looking man, lying listlessly on the straw of his dungeon, scarcely clothed with a few tattered rags, and surrounded by rats and reptiles. Madame Necker soothed

his fixed and sullen despair with promises of speedy relief; nor did she depart until she had kept her word, and seen M. de Lautrec removed to an abode where, if still a prisoner, he might at least spend in peace the few days left him by the tyranny of his oppressors.

It is said that the celebrated De la Tude, the ill-fated victim of Madame de Pompadour, also owed his freedom to the interference of Madame Necker, whose attention was first drawn to his case by the humble but generous Madame le Gros. Acts of individual benevolence were not, however, the only object of the minister's wife. Notwithstanding the munificence of her private charities, she aimed none the less to effect general good. Considerable ameliorations were introduced by her in the condition of the hospitals of Paris. She entered, with unwearied patience, into the most minute details of their actual administration, and, with admirable ingenuity, rectified errors or suggested improvements. Her aim was to effect a greater amount of good with the same capital, which she now saw grossly squandered and misapplied. The reforms which she thus introduced were both important and severe. She sacrificed almost the whole of her time to this praiseworthy task, and ultimately devoted a considerable sum to found the hospital which still bears her name. Beyond this, Madame Necker sought to exercise no power over her husband, or through his means. She loved him far too truly and too well to aim at an influence which might have degraded him in the eyes of the world. Necker was, however, proud of his noble-hearted wife, and never hesitated to confess how much he was indebted to her advice. When he retired from office, in 1781, and published his famous "Compte Rendu," he seized the opportunity of paying a high and heartfelt homage to the virtues of his wife. "Whilst retracing," he observes at the conclusion of his work, "a portion of the charitable tasks prescribed by your majesty, let me be permitted, sire, to allude, without naming her, to a person gifted with singular virtues, and who has materially assisted me in accomplishing the designs of your majesty.

Although her name was never uttered to you, in all the vanities of high office, it is right, sire, that you should be aware that it is known and frequently invoked in the most obscure asylums of suffering humanity. It is no doubt most fortunate for a minister of finance to find, in the companion of his life, the assistance he needs for so many details of beneficence and charity, which might otherwise prove too much for his strength and attention. Carried away by the tumults of general affairs,—often obliged to sacrifice the feelings of the private man to the duties of the citizen, he may well esteem himself happy, when the complaints of poverty and misery can be confided to an enlightened person who shares the sentiment of his duties."

Necker was greatly criticised for the public acknowledgment he thus made of his wife's virtues, and of the aid which he had derived from them; but he spoke so because her power had been pure, and such as he did not blush to avow. The influence of Madame Necker over her husband was not, however, always irreprehensible: his resignation, in 1781, which delivered France over to Calonne and Loménie, is generally attributed to her. The grief she felt at the libels which daily appeared against him, joined to her ardent and ambitious wish of seeing him acknowledged minister—an office of which he had all the toil and responsibility without the dignity it conferred—induced her to persuade her husband to tender his resignation, unless he could obtain the post to which his services gave him a claim. The intrigues of Maurepas, and of all the courtiers he had irritated by his economy, prevented this justice from being rendered to Necker. His resignation was accepted, and he retired once more to private life.

The saloon of Madame Necker, during this her husband's first ministry, (for such it was in reality, though not in name,) was much enlivened by the presence of her only child, Germaine Necker, who afterwards became the celebrated Madame de Staël, and whose character already differed so strikingly from that of her mother. Madame Necker, with all her high principle and noble qualities, was rigid and somewhat pedantic.

She was capable of a deep and sincere attachment, but her mind was too calm and too well-disciplined for passion. Her slightest actions were regulated by a sense of method and duty. She neither admitted nor understood other laws of conduct. Germaine Necker, on the contrary, displayed, even as a child, an ardent nature, full of passionate impulses, strange in one so young. The least emotion of joy or grief affected her even to pain; she could scarcely hear her parents commended without bursting into tears; and the mere thought of meeting some remarkable and celebrated personage made her heart beat, and powerfully agitated her whole frame. For this impetuous and enthusiastic young being to be placed under the control of the calm and methodical Madame Necker, was like a lava stream compelled to flow through some cold northern region. Nothing annoyed Madame Necker more deeply than this wide dissimilarity which nature had placed between herself and her daughter. She had early resolved to educate her child according to a peculiarly strict system of her own; but it was in vain that she sought to curb that burning spirit within the sphere of her formal rules. Germaine was docile to the will of her parents, and would willingly have obeyed, if an irresistible impulse had not led her far beyond her mother's cold and methodical teaching. One of her favourite amusements, as a child, was to cut out paper kings and queens, and make them act in tragedies which she improvised on the instant, speaking for all the characters successively. Madame Necker, whose rigid Calvinist notions were offended by her daughter's theatrical predilections, interdicted this amusement, which Germaine, unable to relinquish, followed in secret. It was also by stealth that she read most of the novels of the day; amongst the rest, Richardson's "Clarissa Harlowe," whose elopement, as she afterwards so happily expressed it, had been one of the great events of her own youth.

Instead of being educated, like most of the young ladies of the period, in the calm seclusion of a convent, Mademoiselle Necker was thus reared at home, and allowed to mingle freely

with the talented guests who assembled in her mother's drawing-room. This produced in her a premature development of intellect which, though it could not weaken her powerful genius, most probably abridged her brilliant career. Germaine generally sat on a low wooden stool, near the arm-chair, and under the watchful eye of Madame Necker, who constantly reminded her to hold herself straight. Though the child was dark and plain, the striking intelligence of her expressive countenance, and the wonderful beauty of her large black eyes, gave her a singular attraction; with all the grace and freshness of youth, she had had none of its puerility. Some of the gravest men who visited Madame Necker, found evident pleasure in conversing with the pale, earnest girl. The precocity of her judgment already revealed what she would one day become. The Abbé Raynal discerned amongst the first her intellectual power; and she was scarcely emerging from childhood, when he wished her to contribute a dissertation on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, for his great philosophical work. In this feverish atmosphere of praise and intellectual excitement grew up Germaine Necker. From her mother she imbibed a strong religious feeling, which never abandoned her; Necker imparted to her his ambitious love of political popularity; and the society in which she was brought up strengthened her passion for literature and fed the burning flame of her genius. Her life and her writings bear deep traces of these three powerful principles.

The natural result of an education which thus sequestered her almost entirely from that self-communion that teaches how to dispense with the world's approbation or blame, was to engender a passionate thirst of applause and social distinction in the daughter of Necker. Dazzled by the power then granted to conversational eloquence, she also sought to shine by that brilliant accomplishment: nor was it mere vanity that induced her to act thus; there is, and must ever be, deep pleasure in the exercise of great intellectual powers like hers. As a talker, she has not, perhaps, been surpassed. Clear, comprehensive, and vigorous, like that of man, her

language was also full of womanly passion and tenderness. The calm Madame Necker was soon thrown into the shade by her brilliant and accomplished daughter: she was too noble-minded to feel the least jealousy of one who was so dear to her, although their natures were most uncongenial; but she was hurt to perceive that her husband, that object of her exclusive idolatry, almost preferred the companionship of his daughter to her own. The deep attachment which Necker's wife always professed for him was a passion in the soul of the more ardent Germaine. She carried this feeling to an excess, and once confessed, "that she could almost feel jealous of her mother." Could a man so ardently loved fail to be vain? The decaying health of her mother also contributed to give more importance to Germaine, in the soirées held at her father's house. Madame Necker became afflicted towards the end of her life with a painful nervous disease, that compelled her to remain constantly standing: she had become thin and extremely pale; her dazzling freshness had wholly vanished, and when she now received her guests she looked more cold and statue-like than ever by the side of her animated daughter. Weakened by long illness, she welcomed, as a relief, the comparative neglect of her latter years, and gladly left Paris after the close of her husband's second ministry. They retired to Coppet, where she died in 1794, calm and resigned amidst the most acute sufferings.

If Madame Necker has not left so remarkable a name as many women of her time; if her contemporaries, justly perhaps, found her too cold and formal; yet she shines, at least in that dark age, a noble example of woman's highest virtues —devoted love, truth, and purity.

CHAPTER III.

MADAME DE GENLIS—THE "ORDER OF PERSEVERANCE"—MADAME DE MONTESSON—FRANKLIN—DEATH OF VOLTAIRE AND ROUSSEAU.

THE golden days, when woman ruled arbitrarily over the French social world, were now nearly over. The society of Madame Necker was one of the very few that maintained its position; and this may have been partly owing to Necker's political power. The little economist coterie of Madame d'Angivilliers still remained; but it was too circumscribed in its spirit to possess the wide influence it might otherwise have exercised. Notwithstanding these disadvantageous circumstances, many women could still, when sufficiently attractive, obtain a considerable share of the dominion which had at one time been so liberally granted to their sex; but the difference between their former and their actual power was that the latter proved to be essentially personal, and could no longer be exercised through the medium of a coterie.

Amongst the women who possessed most of this individual influence, during the earlier portion of the reign of Louis XVI., was the pretty and clever Madame de Genlis, then in all the freshness of her charms, and the enjoyment of her literary celebrity. Young, agreeable, with brilliant black eyes, luxuriant light-brown hair, and a countenance of remarkable piquancy, which often caused her to be likened to Marmontel's Roxelane; she, moreover, possessed the suppleness of manner, and soft, insinuating grace, in which the more honest and straightforward Madame Necker entirely failed. Madame de Genlis is now chiefly considered as the authoress of very clever works on education: but, at the epoch when

she figured so brilliantly in French society, she was known as a witty woman of fashion, who played admirably on almost every known musical instrument, mingled in all the gaieties of life, amused herself, and intrigued with the best of Parisian ladies; and who, notwithstanding the time she gave to pleasure, found means, by her singular perseverance and industry, to study various sciences and languages, and to engage in the composition of works requiring, not only a well-practised pen, but also great talent and a considerable degree of research. The highly moral and useful aim of her most important works could not, however, secure the reputation of Madame de Genlis from reproach.

From her first appearance in Parisian society, as Mademoiselle de Saint-Aubin, a young lady of noble birth, reduced to the position of a musical artiste, down to her equivocal connexion with Philippe Egalité, and her intrigues for his party during the revolution, her character and position always appeared in the doubtful and ambiguous light which seldom fails to prove fatal to a woman's fair name.

Her family was ancient and noble, but greatly impoverished. She was still a child, when pecuniary distress compelled her father to leave France. She remained with her mother, a handsome, clever, and intriguing woman, who won the favour of M. de la Popelinière, and was received with her daughter at the splendid seat he possessed at Passy, near Paris. The rich and voluptuous financier allowed himself to be charmed in his old age by the grace and dawning beauty of the youthful Mademoiselle de Saint-Aubin. He lamented her extreme youth, which rendered it impossible to think of marrying her: as, had she only been a few years older, he would have done, in spite of his conjugal experiences and misfortunes. Child as she was, she understood very well his sighing exclamation of *Quel dommage!* whenever his look rested on her graceful though girlish form; and she frankly confesses, in her Memoirs, that she could almost have said *Quel dommage!* herself. Although the disparity of years between sixty-six and thirteen rendered a conjugal union impossible, Mademoiselle

de Saint-Aubin soon wormed herself into the favour of her ancient admirer, by an easy, caressing manner, of which her dependent position early taught her the value. As soon as he discovered the great talent for music of his young protégée, M. de la Popelinière procured her the best and most expensive masters: she was likewise taught declamation, singing, and dancing, at the cost of her generous protector. Nature seemed to have destined her to excel in brilliant and external accomplishments: she soon acted on the theatre in M. de la Popelinière's residence, with infinite tact and humour, and delighted all his guests by dancing a characteristic *pas* taught her by the famous Deshayes.

It was to the early and careful teaching she thus received that Stéphanie de Saint-Aubin owed the musical excellence which, on the death of their benefactor, her mother was compelled to turn to pecuniary advantage. Madame de Saint-Aubin took her daughter into the most fashionable societies, where her musical performances were liberally remunerated. By many of her hosts the young girl was received with the courtesy her birth and former position in life demanded; but a far greater number treated her slightingly, or at the best with patronising politeness. She was drawn from this subordinate position by her marriage with the Count of Genlis, one of the most witty and profligate nobles of the period. The young nobleman had met her father in the colonies, and there contracted a close intimacy with him. When they had been acquainted some time, M. de Saint-Aubin confidentially shewed to his young friend the letters he received from his daughter. M. de Genlis was charmed with the simple and graceful style of these epistles, and still more with a delightful miniature portrait which accompanied them, and scarcely did justice to the attractive features and graceful person of the writer. His first visit, when he returned to France, was paid to Mademoiselle de Saint-Aubin. The freshness and piquancy of her beauty, the easy vivacity of her manners, her wit, and accomplishments, surpassed his expectations and fascinated him completely. He married her, notwithstanding the op-

position of his family, and generously enabled her father to return to France, by paying off his creditors.

The pretty Madame de Genlis soon ranked amongst the fashionable women of the day. Full of tact and talent, ambitious and persevering under an air of frivolous gaiety, she succeeded in pacifying her husband's relatives, and in obliterating whatever discredit she might have derived from her former position as a musical artiste. Her conduct was, however, strongly characterised by that mixture of independence and levity which marked society under the rule of Louis XV.: she rode and dressed like a man; went in disguise to the Bal des Porcherons; danced there with the footman of M. de Brancas; and, when not otherwise occupied, amused herself with studying anatomy and bleeding the sick. Her restless and aspiring temper led her to seek distinction by every attainable method. There then existed in French society a fashionable reaction in favour of knightly virtues, and the golden days of ancient chivalry. Carousals and other pastimes of the olden time were revived at Versailles. This enthusiasm resembled, in many respects, the spirit of knight-errantry. The young nobles seemed to have proclaimed themselves the champions of freedom and humanity. Women, like the ladies of yore,

> "Whose bright eyes
> Rain'd influence, and judged the prize,"

urged them on, and by their impulsive enthusiasm materially aided this movement. In order to identify herself with it, Madame de Genlis founded a romantic order entitled the "Order of Perseverance;" but fearing lest her own authority might not suffice to recommend and bring it into repute, she declared that it was of the very highest antiquity, having originally flourished in Poland, for several centuries, and that she held the laws and statutes from the Princess Potocka and the Count of Brostocki: both were her friends, and confirmed this account. Stanislaus, King of Poland, with whom Madame de Genlis then carried on a friendly correspondence, who had sent her his portrait, and to whom she had forwarded

hers in return, favoured her sentimental fraud by writing her a letter intended to be exhibited, and in which he thanked her for having revived this ancient Polish order. Picturesque costumes, borrowed from the Middle Ages, enigmas composed by Madame de Genlis, moral questions, virtuous speeches, ingenious mottoes, and chivalrous oaths, formed the staple of this "Order of Perseverance:" a toy well fit for a puerile and decaying aristocracy.

The fêtes and ceremonies of this institution afford no interest; the most amusing circumstance connected with it was, that the historian Rulhière gravely told Madame de Genlis he was well acquainted with the order and all its statutes, having met with interesting details relative to it in his researches on the history of Poland. Madame de Genlis could not inform him that the soi-disant Polish order owed its existence to her own fertile brain; but she was much entertained at the positive knowledge displayed by the learned historian. Her literary successes, and the education of the children of the Duke of Chartres, soon diverted the attention of Madame de Genlis from her "Order of Perseverance;" which, being deprived of her fostering care, languished, and was ultimately forgotten.

The connexion of Madame de Genlis with the Orleans family (a connexion which influenced the whole of her life) had originated with her husband, one of the favourites and boon companions of the Duke of Chartres. The clever lady had early displayed her talent for intrigue at the expense of this branch of the royal family, by marrying her aunt, Madame de Montesson, to the old Duke of Orleans. The duke had for many years been connected with an actress named *Marquise*. This circumstance gave great annoyance to the ladies of his little court, who, unable to associate with the mistress of the prince, were thus debarred from the fêtes and pleasure parties he gave at his various country-seats to Mademoiselle Marquise. In order to obviate so serious an evil, they tacitly agreed—well-bred people never speak of such things—to give the duke, if possible, a mistress of their own rank: a nobly-born, accom-

plished lady, who would know how to do the honours of her lover's princely entertainments, and with whom they could associate, at least without degradation. They fixed upon the Marchioness of Montesson—a handsome widow, with whom the prince was evidently as much in love as his phlegmatic nature would allow him to be with any one—as the person most likely to effect their prudent and moral purpose. Madame de Montesson was accordingly studiously praised *to* the Duke of Orleans. Her beauty, her talents, her virtues, were so constantly exalted in his presence, that the weak-minded old man thought she must certainly be a paragon of perfection. She behaved with infinite tact; for, instead of throwing herself in the duke's way, she feigned a violent and despairing passion for the Count of Guines. This nobleman was in the secret, and treated her with marked indifference. The old duke, affected by the sorrow of the woman he loved, sought to console her; Madame de Montesson eagerly accepted his friendship, and, after heightening his passion by every art in her power, ended by declaring herself entirely cured of her unhappy love. This rather cooled the Duke of Orleans: the great disparity of rank between them made him hesitate to offer her his hand; the rigidity of the principles he had always heard her profess, forbade him to think of any less honourable proposal. In this dilemma, he would probably have given up Madame de Montesson altogether, if her niece had not interfered. Madame de Genlis wished to serve her aunt; she also entertained the ambitious and not unnatural desire of being connected by alliance with the Orleans family. She accordingly employed all her tact and talent to seduce the old duke into the proposed marriage; he wavered long, but her arts finally triumphed, and in the year 1773, Madame de Montesson became the wife of one of the first princes of the royal blood of France.

The vexation of the ladies who had contributed to raise her to this unexpected elevation was extreme. They had not suspected Madame de Montesson of so much ambition or principle, nor had they thought to find a superior where they

only wished for an equal. They, however, derived some consolation from the fact that, though the king acknowledged her as the legitimate wife of the Duke of Orleans, he refused her the rank and titles of her husband. Madame de Montesson, consequently, abstained from going to court. The Count of Guines received the embassy of Berlin for his share in the intrigue, and Madame de Genlis owed to the joint efforts of her aunt and her husband, a place in the household of the young Duchess of Chartres then recently married.

Madame de Montesson, not being recognised as Duchess of Orleans, attempted to shine by her talents. She gained an unfortunate degree of notoriety from the number of bad plays she wrote. They were admired by her friends, and hissed by the public: this ill fortune afforded her, however, the opportunity of acting with great spirit and dignity. She was advised not to acknowledge the authorship of the unsuccessful comedies, and thus to screen herself from ridicule; but she firmly refused, lest some other person might be suspected. Madame de Montesson might be a bad authoress, but she was a very clever and agreeable woman; she sang and played well, and even in her old age excelled in flower-painting, of which she has left some masterly specimens. She understood several sciences, spoke with grace and elegance, and was an admirable actress; in consequence of which, private theatricals were her favourite amusement. These qualifications, joined to high rank, great wealth, and polished manners, caused her house to be considered one of the most pleasant in Paris; even though the guests were sometimes obliged to praise, and, what was more difficult, to listen to her tedious, heavy comedies. When Voltaire visited Paris in the year 1778, he solicited with great eagerness the favour of being admitted to one of the private performances, in which she acted with the Duke of Orleans. The request was granted, and the old poet shewed his gratitude by applauding until the fall of the the curtain. The duke, leaning on the arm of his wife, then advanced towards the box of Voltaire; who, with the extreme and ludicrous vivacity which characterised him even in old

âge, knelt down to receive the prince and Madame de Montesson.

The Duke of Orleans died in 1785. Louis XVI., somewhat ungraciously, forbade Madame de Montesson to wear deep mourning for her husband. She retired to a convent, where she spent the time of her widowhood. When she reappeared in the world, it was to signalise herself by her benevolence. During the severe winter of the year 1788, she converted her hothouses into asylums for the poor. There they not only received a shelter from the intense cold, but were fed and employed at her expense. It is said that this generous act was not forgotten by the people, and enabled Madame de Montesson to pass unscathed through the evil days of the French Revolution.

As ambitious as her aunt, and far more talented, Madame de Genlis was, in the mean while, laying the basis of her future reputation. She had excellent opportunities of doing so in the household of the young Duchess of Chartres, with whom she soon became as great a favourite as her husband was with the Duke. The Duchess of Chartres, though virtuous, and wholly devoted to her unworthy husband, was also young, beautiful, and fond of pleasure. Almost all her ladies of honour were handsome and witty; they formed a very gay little court, much frequented by foreigners of distinction, and by those members of the French aristocracy who preferred the freedom of the Palais-Royal to the old stateliness of Versailles. The Duchess of Chartres, in thus establishing a court of her own, only aimed at amusement; her husband entertained far deeper views. The unbounded indulgence of those excesses, which had left their indelible traces on his once noble and handsome features, had not erased from the mind of the young duke the hereditary talent, pride, and jealousy of his race. He was disliked by Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI.; he hated them in return. If his errors were great, he felt they were not more flagrant than those of the king's brother, the Count of Artois. Yet he was pointed out, almost exclusively, to public scorn. Disappointed ambition heightened the re-

sentment of wounded pride. Louis XVI., with the policy of his predecessors, refused to grant the Duke of Chartres the high posts and the influence which he claimed.

The elements of a vast opposition, social and not yet political (for the government was still absolute) pervaded the whole of society; the irritated prince gathered them within his grasp, and led the movement. He soon became the model of fashion with the young and profligate nobles; the women admired his recklessness and daring; the court feared him; the people, flattered by his courtesy, remembered the traditions which foretold a high destiny for his house: in those traditions it is said that he himself had a superstitious faith. Thoughtless young men and clever women became the chief agents of his ambitious designs. He was quickly and instinctively attracted by the wit, beauty, and supple intriguing spirit of Madame de Genlis. The very pointed attentions he paid her gave rise to some rumours unheeded by the guileless Duchess of Chartres. The Count of Genlis betrayed not the least jealousy. In the year 1776, the Duke of Chartres, with the consent of his wife, confided to Madame de Genlis the education of his infant daughters; and, some time afterwards, named her *gouverneur* of his sons.

Whatever may have been the errors of Madame de Genlis, or the nature of her connexion with the father of the children whose instruction she undertook, she at least educated them as few French princes had been educated since the time of Fénelon. "She made them," said an eminent historian, "not princes, but men." The numerous works on education which she composed for their benefit procured her, at the same time, an extraordinary degree of reputation. Buffon, who affectionately gave her the name of "daughter," once compared her style to that of Fénelon; and, alluding to the moral tone of her writings, enthusiastically styled her "an angel of light!" The education which Madame de Genlis gave to her pupils, whilst leaving them all the elegance and graces of their high rank, was eminently calculated to render them popular at a future time. This was done intentionally. The duke

and the governess needed not much penetration to perceive the increasing power awarded to liberal ideas. A signal instance was afforded by the immense influence which the American War of Independence exercised towards this period over public opinion in France.

All the latent republican tendencies of the nation burst forth with sudden and unexpected energy. The sympathy with the insurgent Americans was so strong and universal as to alarm the king and queen; though they both favoured the American cause. In this matter, as in many other respects, their personal feelings were wholly at variance with their policy. Joseph II., the brother of Marie-Antoinette, and a reforming and philosophic sovereign, had, however, tact enough to perceive that it ill became an absolute monarch, like his brother-in-law, to assist and countenance republican insurgents. He was sojourning at Versailles at the time when the American question proved, even in the royal palace, the all-absorbing topic of every conversation. A lady asked his opinion on the subject: "I must decline answering," he replied: "my business is to be a royalist." The young Marquis of La Fayette, who was then only eighteen years of age, observed not the same caution. He spoke, at the circle of the queen, openly and enthusiastically in favour of the American cause. Marie Antoinette greatly resented his indiscretion. She instinctively hated a war waged by the people against royalty.

Young, wealthy, and the bearer of a noble name, La Fayette might have aspired to the first offices of the court; he preferred to these vain distinctions the dangers and the glory of a foreign war in favour of freedom and independence. In spite of the opposition of his family, and notwithstanding the displeasure of government, he openly declared that he at least would unite his standard to that of the Americans. A considerable number of the young French nobles shared his ardour, and followed him across the Atlantic, eager to shed their blood in the cause of plebeian liberty. The enthusiasm which animated the whole nation at this epoch would now

appear excessive and almost incredible. It is not, however, so difficult to understand it on reflection. Imbued as they were with republican and philosophic doctrines, the French had yet no politics of their own. Their energies were wasted away in the unproductive warfare of literature, or in vain drawing-room discussions. Dreams, aspirations towards the future, brilliant and fruitless theories, were the only real occupation of daring and intelligent men, who blushed and murmured at the childish inactivity to which they were condemned. The American war, by engrossing every mind, acted as a temporary palliative; but, whilst so doing, it fanned the internal flame which then consumed the very heart of France. The freedom denied at home was at least worshipped abroad: every token of admiration for America and her heroic deliverers was an indirect but energetic protest against the enslaved condition of France, and the blind neglect of her rulers. The noble La Fayette became the hero of the day: his bust was seen everywhere; his name was pronounced by all with respect and enthusiasm.

The extreme popularity of the young and chivalrous noble was divided, and possessed, perhaps, even in a greater degree, by the plain Quaker, Franklin. When the American printer appeared in the Parisian circles, with his prim Quaker dress, unpowdered hair, and plain round hat, the contrast his sober attire offered to the rich and brilliant costume worn by both sexes produced an extraordinary impression on the still frivolous society of the period. The Quaker garb henceforth became identified with primitive virtue and republican simplicity. The quaintness of the doctor's manners; his shrewdness, sagacity, and good sense; the calm firmness of his patriotism, were all idealised by the women; whose enthusiasm greatly contributed to his success. Franklin bore his good fortune with great equanimity. "The account you have had of the vogue I am in here," he observes in one of his letters to his American friends, "has some truth. Perhaps few strangers in France have had the good fortune to be so universally popular. I hope to preserve, while I stay, the

regard you mention of the French ladies; for their society and conversation, when I have time to enjoy them, are extremely agreeable." He is still more explicit in a letter to his daughter:—"The clay medallion of me you say you gave to Mr Hopkinson, was the first of the kind made in France. A variety of others have been made since of different sizes, some to be set in the lid of snuff-boxes, and some so small as to be worn in wrings; and the number sold is incredible. These, with the pictures, busts, and prints, (of which copies upon copies are spread everywhere,) have made your father's face as well known as that of the moon; so that he durst not do anything that would oblige him to run away, as his phiz would discover him wherever he should venture to shew it."

There is no exaggeration in the account given by Franklin of his popularity. Though the queen scarcely concealed her astonishment at the enthusiasm he excited, the Parisian ladies gave him several splendid fêtes, at which all the élite of French society assisted. On one of those occasions, the most beautiful among the three hundred women present crowned the patriotic doctor with a laurel wreath, and then kissed him on either cheek. His bust was not only seen everywhere with that of La Fayette, but, even at the exhibition of Sèvres porcelain, which took place in the palace of Versailles, medallions of Franklin, bearing the legend,

"Eripuit cœlo fulmen
Sceptrumque tyrannis,"

were publicly sold. Everything became *à la Franklin* and *à la Washington*. The celebrated dancer, Vestris, who styled himself, in his Provençal dialect, *le diou de la danse*, and who openly declared that the age had only produced three great men—Frederick, Voltaire, and himself!—condescended to assume the name and character of Washington, when the rebellious opera-dancers, who were then quarrelling with their director, formed themselves into a *congress* (*sic*) at the house of Mademoiselle Guimard.

Whilst in the triumph of America France already hailed her own revolution, she bade a last farewell to the chiefs of

the old sceptic philosophy and the new democratic theories, Voltaire and Rousseau; who died in the spring of the year 1778, within a month of each other.

After an absence of twenty-seven years, and in the eighty-fourth year of his age, Voltaire once more visited Paris. It was decided that he should not be received at court. Marie Antoinette, less strictly devout than her husband, regretted being unable to behold one of the most illustrious men of his age. Voltaire was amply compensated for this slight of the court by the extraordinary honours with which he was everywhere else received. He no sooner appeared in the theatre where his last piece, "Irene," was acted, than the whole audience rose and greeted him with long and enthusiastic acclamations. When the tragedy was over, the author's bust was discovered on the stage, and crowned with laurel, amidst repeated bursts of applause. Few men ever had a more passionate love of renown than Voltaire, and few had their desire so entirely fulfilled. Overpowered with emotion, he rose at length, on trembling limbs, and prepared to depart. His countenance was wasted and pale, but his fine dark eyes, now filled with tears, had preserved all their former softness and brilliancy. Men of the highest rank, and the most noble and beautiful women, crowded around him as he left his seat, and literally bore him down to his carriage. "Do you, then, want to kill me with joy?" he exclaimed, addressing those who surrounded him. He was led home by an enthusiastic crowd, bearing lighted torches, so that all might behold once more the idol of France. The streets resounded with shouts of triumph as the poet passed by.

A few weeks after receiving these memorable honours, Voltaire died, on the 30th of May 1778. The clergy refused to bury him; and, whilst his name was on every lip, the government forbade his death to be mentioned in the public journals —a strange instance of the wilful blindness of those by whom France was then ruled.

A month after the death of Voltaire occurred that of Rousseau. No lofty and dazzling triumph awaited the obscure end

of the apostle of democracy. Surrounded by the few friends whom his misanthropic temper had not yet wholly estranged, he felt the hand of death stealing upon him at the close of a lovely summer's day. "Let me behold once more that glorious setting sun," was his last request; and with his dying glance turned towards the western horizon, he passed away from life, his last look greeted by those pure harmonies of creation in which alone his feverish and troubled spirit had ever found repose.

Though Rousseau's death produced no visible sensation in French society, he left behind him a spirit far more potent than that of Voltaire. To destroy creed had been Voltaire's chosen mission: to create a new society was that of Rousseau. On these two principles rested the whole theory of the French Revolution.

CHAPTER IV.

UNPOPULARITY OF MARIE ANTOINETTE—FAVOURS SHEWN TO MADAME DE POLIGNAC—HER SOCIETY—ILL FEELING BETWEEN MADAME DE GENLIS AND THE QUEEN.

THE American war, the visit of Voltaire to Paris, his triumph and death, gave a powerful impulse to public opinion. When America was entirely free, and when peace had been concluded with England, this impulse was strongly felt. The attention of all then reverted to the internal state of France; which had, in the meantime, grown extremely critical.

Louis XVI. was sincere and honest: he really intended to fulfil the hopes excited by his accession to the throne; but those hopes were so extravagant, they implied so complete a change in every existing institution, that he soon considered the task of radical reform beyond his power. He sought, however, to remedy desperate evils with temporary palliatives; whilst the nation, irritated against the old abuses, daily manifested a more impatient and uncontrollable spirit. Within the first year of his reign, when the joy it had excited was still at its height, there lurked through all this enthusiasm a secret feeling of discontent. In almost all the towns of France, serious riots, occasioned by the high price of corn, broke forth. Seditions and violent placards, urging the people to revolt, were every morning torn from the walls by the watchful police. Severe measures were taken to repress this revolt: a few men were hanged; the people subsided once more into their sullen silence, and the whole of this plebeian affair soon sank into oblivion.

With the choice of his ministers arose the first embarrassment of Louis XVI. The power of D'Aiguillon fell, of course, with Madame du Barry. The young queen, possessed as yet

of no influence, vainly sought to reinstate Choiseul. Her husband would not hear of the favourite of Madame de Pompadour. In this dilemma, the young monarch consulted his aunts, MESDAMES. The fate of France then hung on the caprice of four women, who had never been allowed the least political power, and whose principles were directed by the liking or aversion they had conceived for the ministers, whom the whim of their father's mistresses successively raised to office. They hesitated for some time between two ex-ministers, Machault and Maurepas. Machault, severe and honest, had made numerous enemies at court; Maurepas, a gay and brilliant courtier, had been disgraced for composing a satirical song against Madame de Pompadour; MESDAMES decided in his favour. The frivolous old man, to whom age could not impart its wisdom or even its gravity, was once more called to power. The king also sought the assistance of Malesherbes and Turgot, both members of the philosophic party. They were talented and zealous, but too intolerant and exclusive. Their attempts at premature reform only raised them a host of enemies; and the men who sought no less than to regenerate a whole nation, fell before paltry court intriguers. This philosophic power was, nevertheless, a step taken in the right direction, since it acknowledged the supremacy of public opinion. The reforming ministers employed pamphleteers to expose and defend their opinions, and adopted other indirect methods of ascertaining how far the current of general feeling lay in their favour. The publicity thus given to the ministerial measures also occasioned very important debates in society. Necker, seconded by his wife, acted a leading part in those discussions; for serious dissensions divided even the philosophic party. Necker early opposed the plans of Turgot; a circumstance which obtained him the favour of those nobles whom the severity of Turgot's principles had alienated. The women, according to their custom, took an active share in this controversy, discussed political economy at their toilet, and dogmatically established the supremacy of whatever opinions they chose to favour.

Marie Antoinette also interfered in these important matters, but not with much judgment or success. Her sympathies for Choiseul first led her to favour the reformers; she was, however, soon disgusted with their severity. The partisans of the old system of government, who accused her of inducing her husband to confide too exclusively to the economists, urged her to unite herself to Maurepas, in order to overthrow Turgot. She did so, and effected her object: for already had she gained over her weak husband that fatal power which is linked with almost every error in the history of his reign.

For a long time the dazzling beauty and winning grace of Marie Antoinette had remained powerless over the calm and phlegmatic Louis XVI. He allowed her no influence whatever during the first year of his reign. Mesdames, it is said, had prejudiced him against his wife,—the pledge of the hated Austrian alliance. The young monarch, like them, instinctively distrusted Marie Antoinette. He knew so well her passionate attachment for the house of Austria, that, whenever any affair relative to it had to be transacted, he anxiously recommended his ministers not to mention the matter to the queen. However great her power may have been subsequently, it is certain that she could never exercise it either in favour of Choiseul or of her Austrian relatives. When the native coldness of Louis XVI. had been once subdued, he granted, however, considerable influence to his young and beautiful wife. After she had given heirs to the throne, the queen thought herself justified in interfering with political matters more openly than she had done till then. From the moment that this was perceived to be the case, her popularity rapidly declined. It was still at its height, when her brother, Joseph II., visited France, in the year 1777. They went together one night to the opera, and entered the theatre as the actors, who performed Gluck's "Iphigénia," were singing the chorus—

"Chantons, celebrons notre reine," &c.

When Marie Antoinette appeared in her box the whole house seized the apropos, and enthusiastically repeated

"Chantons, celebrons notre reine," &c. Overcome with emotion, the young queen bowed her head between her hands and burst into tears. Linked, as her name is now with scarcely-paralleled misfortunes most heroically endured, it is difficult to conceive how Marie Antoinette could draw down on herself the deep hatred which grew in silent strength with every year of her unhappy reign, suddenly broke forth at the Revolution, and ultimately led her to the scaffold. Minute and almost trifling causes produced this result.

The qualities of Marie Antoinette were of those which misfortune calls forth, but which seldom shine in prosperity. Fickle and wilful in everything, she capriciously favoured or opposed ministers. Whilst the reformers were in fashion, they had her support; she withdrew it when they had lost the approbation of the frivolous coteries who guided her opinions.

This conduct, with a recklessness dangerous even in a queen, and a slight tendency to satire, added to the number of her enemies. Annoyed at the rigid punctiliousness of her lady of honour, Madame de Noailles, she petulantly named her "Madame l'Etiquette." The great and powerful family of the offended lady deeply resented this affront, and entered into a secret, and finally an open, opposition against the queen. Unfortunately for his wife, the graver Louis XVI. did not check her imprudent vivacity, and allowed her to indulge, without restraint, in all the gaieties of the court. Whilst the queen compromised the old stateliness of royalty by too great though innocent freedom, Louis was absorbed in his favourite geography, or studying smith-work with a locksmith named Gamain; who assumed with him the tone and all the authority of a master. "The king," said Gamain, many years afterwards, "was good, forbearing, timid, inquisitive, and addicted to sleep. He was fond of lockmaking to excess; and he concealed himself from the queen and the court to file and forge with me. In order to convey his anvil and my own backwards and forwards, we were obliged to use a thousand stratagems."

Besides the influential Noailles, the queen estranged the

severe religious party, headed by the Princess of Marsan, governess of Louis XVI.'s two sisters. This lady, offended at the ridicule with which Marie Antoinette, whilst yet dauphiness, had spoken of the austere education she gave her pupils, dwelt, in her turn, with some asperity on the levity of the young Austrian princess; who found censors still more severe in the bosom of the royal family. Mesdames, though good and amiable women, never liked their niece. She was an Austrian, and she favoured Choiseul, whom they detested. They deplored her frivolousness, her prodigality, and especially her influence over her husband; which had superseded their own. They sought not to injure her, but their ill-repressed blame swelled the voice of general murmur. Her brother-in-law, Monsieur, (afterwards Louis XVIII.,) and his wife, Madame, proved more active and formidable opponents. They envied the queen, and headed a sort of secret court opposition against her and Louis XVI. The Duke of Chartres was her professed enemy: he hated her; for to her and her influence he ascribed all the mortifications his ambition and pride had endured.

However uninteresting these trifling court matters may justly seem at the present epoch, they then possessed a vast degree of importance. The wounded pride of Madame de Noailles, the discontent of Madame de Marsan and Mesdames, the envy of Monsieur, the resentment of the Duke of Chartres, considerably influenced public opinion with regard to Marie Antoinette; and that hatred which the people were gradually taught to feel for her very name, hastened the Revolution, and precipitated the fall of monarchy. Each frivolous action, light word, or look of scornful pride,—each feeling of enmity she had ever raised,—bore their fruit in time for the hapless queen. Evilly disposed, however, as were her enemies, she could only blame her own imprudence if their calumnies took effect. Few women, so critically placed as she was, sacrificed less than Marie Antoinette to the spirit of the times. France was an absolute monarchy, but tempered, as a courtier once observed, by songs and epigrams: in other words, by the

power of public opinion. If the queen had secured this mighty auxiliary on her side, she might well have braved her antagonists ; but, proud in the consciousness of innocence and sovereign power, she recklessly allowed them to enlist every class of society against her and her name. It was for the sake of conciliating a few individuals, and often a female favourite, that Marie Antoinette thus estranged influential masses. She carried friendship to the height of a passion. Her love for the king, though sincere and devoted, could not absorb all her affections. The contrast between Louis XVI. and his beautiful wife suggested many uncharitable thoughts to their courtiers. Calumny successively attributed to the Count of Artois, the Duke of Lauzun, and the Count of Fersen, a share in the favour of the queen. No proofs of her alleged errors have ever been produced. Her favourite attendant, Madame Campan, when pressed on this subject, many years after the death of her royal mistress, confessed that Marie Antoinette had indeed once experienced a deep and unhappy attachment, but averred with solemn energy that this involuntary feeling had ever remained pure and unsullied. The restraints which duty and self-respect thus imposed upon her feelings, rendered the queen more unreserved in the manifestations of her friendship. Madame de Maillé, the Princess of Lamballe, and Madame de Polignac successively attracted her notice. They were all three gentle and beautiful women, but the affection she felt for them proved very fatal to the popularity of Marie Antoinette.

Madame de Polignac was disinterested, and really loved the queen for her own sake ; but she was surrounded by a host of needy, grasping, and ambitious relatives, who speculated in a shameful manner on the friendship of Marie Antoinette. Titles, pensions, favours, and lucrative posts, were showered down on the happy favourite and her friends. Her sister-in-law, the Countess Diana of Polignac, an ugly, overbearing woman, generally detested, was said to rule her completely ; to instruct her every morning concerning her behaviour with the queen, and to give her a list of the favours to be asked in

the course of the day. So insolent did this Countess Diana become, that even the gentle Princess Elizabeth, to whom she was lady of honour, could not endure her tyranny; and, in order to escape from her, took refuge at Saint-Cyr. It was only on the personal intercession of Louis XVI., who shared all his wife's weakness for the Polignacs, that harmony was restored between Madame Elizabeth and her imperious attendant.

The lucrative favours bestowed on the Princess of Lamballe, and especially on Madame de Polignac and her friends, caused much jealousy at court. The proud and powerful Noailles looked down with haughty displeasure on their upstart rivals. The political power which Marie Antoinette granted to the Polignacs was viewed with equal disfavour by all those who could not hope to share in it. If she ruled the king, the Polignacs ruled her. Necker, in the account he subsequently gave of his second ministry, complained that the measures he proposed to the king had to be submitted to the queen, the princes, Madame de Polignac, her friends, and even to Marie Antoinette's femme de chambre, Madame Campan, before they could be carried into effect. Marie Antoinette was, however, friendly to Necker. She sought to prevent him from resigning in 1781; but it was by employing personal entreaty, and not by obtaining for him the post he had asked, and which his services certainly deserved. When Necker had resigned his authority, the queen desired to have a private interview with him, for the purpose of inducing him to remain in office. A crowd of distinguished persons waited at the door of her apartment, in order to learn the result of her interference. She soon came forth, with a sad and troubled countenance: "He refuses absolutely!" she said with a sigh. Necker's resignation—the work of Maurepas—was indeed considered in the light of a public calamity. Marie Antoinette—offended perhaps at not having conquered the resolve of the austere Genevese, and probably influenced by her friends—capriciously withdrew her favour from Necker, and strenuously opposed his recall at a later period.

A vague consciousness of her failing popularity, the knowledge of the great social power which women then possessed, and the wish of sharing in this influence, induced Marie Antoinette to open to her friends the drawing-room of Madame de Polignac, to whom she had given an apartment in the palace of Versailles. "Here," she often observed with a smile, "I am no longer the queen: I am myself." She wished for the power thus exercised to be exclusively the power of the woman. But, beautiful and attractive as she was, Marie Antoinette acted imprudently in thus casting away the prestige of rank. She was not sufficiently brilliant or witty to rival the women who presided over the societies of the day; unless, indeed, she opened, like them, the saloon of her friend to the men: without whom those societies would, after all, have been insipid. She did not do so; and, though honoured with the royal presence, the society of Madame de Polignac was accordingly considered most unentertaining. The queen possessed little conversational talent; her quiet friend had none—"For," as the envious courtiers never failed, indeed, to remark, "the royal favourites were all commonplace women." This was true; and it confirmed the report that, notwithstanding a few happy repartees, Marie Antoinette was not herself very clever or intellectual. She disliked serious conversation, and excluded it wherever she appeared. The eighteenth century never produced a less literary coterie than that over which she presided. The agreeable Madame de Boufflers, wishing to excuse herself from complying with a request addressed to her by Madame de Polignac, did so in a polite letter, mingled with poetry. Madame de Polignac shewed the verses to her friends, who criticised them very bitterly. Their remarks being repeated to Madame de Boufflers, she replied, with a smile, "I regret that they find the verses so bad, for the sake of poor Racine; for they are by him, and not by me." Superficial wits, like Rivarol, were received at the soirées of Madame de Polignac, in order to supply the deficiencies of the ladies. When the queen gave a concert, Gluck came to accompany her singing. The old

Duchess of Grammont—favoured on account of her brother, Choiseul—the Count of Artois, the Count of Vaudreuil, Rivarol, and the friends of the Polignac family, were amongst the few members of this society; which, with little of the wit of coteries, had their worst fault—exclusion.

The courtiers whom Marie Antoinette refused to admit became so many covert enemies. They spoke with great bitterness on the impropriety of her conduct in thus mingling with untitled literary men, and in singing to the accompaniment of a mere artist like Gluck. They said, and not unjustly, that the evenings which Marie Antoinette devoted to her private amusements were abstracted from the court. Constituted as French society then was, this was a serious objection—one which, had she not been so imprudent, would have had weight with Marie Antoinette. What, indeed, without the presence of the queen, were all the fêtes, pomps, pleasures, and boasted glories of Versailles? When Marie Leczinska adopted, through extreme devotion, a course somewhat similar, her absence from the court was not felt. She was queen in name only; Madame de Pompadour had all the reality and homage of queenly power. But such was not the case with Marie Antoinette. The king loved no other woman; she reigned alone over the court; and when she abandoned it, to seek the quiet drawing-room of Madame de Polignac, the courtiers thought themselves justified in filling the palace with upbraiding murmurs. It was, indeed, folly in the queen to think that she could unite all the power and splendour of rank to the ease and freedom of privacy. The discontent of the noblesse soon reached the middle and inferior classes, between whom and the upper ranks there now existed a much more rapid communication than of yore. Although beyond the precincts of the court the favour of Madame de Polignac could inspire no personal jealousy, a deep feeling of irritation was nevertheless created by the immense sums she was supposed to draw from the state. The favourites of kings had seldom been popular in France; but those of queens had always been odious.

Besides the courtiers and the people, Marie Antoinette also alienated a numerous and powerful class—the artists and literary men, whom she neglected to patronise. She read little, and only light literature. She, whose part in history was to be so dark and tragic, never perused those historical narratives whence she might, perchance, have derived a few useful lessons. Marie Antoinette has very erroneously been represented as a learned and accomplished princess. She frankly confessed to Madame Campan that she had never understood one word of the Latin harangues she uttered in Vienna, and had not even touched the beautiful drawings said by Maria Theresa to be the production of her favourite daughter. The courtiers were somewhat mortified at the queen's evident ignorance, which all her tact and grace could not disguise. When she acted in private theatricals with her brothers-in-law and their wives, many of the spectators observed, loud enough to be heard, that the acting was royally bad, (royalement mal joué.) The queen was still more unfortunate with regard to those pieces which were acted before her, and first produced by her command. In spite of her patronage—perhaps because they were patronised by her—they almost always fell before the Parisian audiences. She was very keenly alive to the slight thus put upon her taste, and which probably arose from a feeling of resentment; for if Madame de Pompadour had been blamed for doing so little in favour of literature, it was nevertheless acknowledged that infinitely less was done by Marie Antoinette.

The Polignacs, though as indifferent as their mistress to such subjects, once chose, however, to patronise an author and a comedy: the author was the unprincipled Beaumarchais—the comedy, the cynical production known as the "Marriage of Figaro," in itself the herald of a revolution. It was a characteristic feature of the times, that this play, which attacked society and government with an immoral degree of levity, and yet with much truth and power, should have been patronised by the friends of Marie Antoinette. The censors,

having prohibited it from being acted, Beaumarchais read the piece to a circle of influential friends, by whom it was pronounced admirable. Every one accordingly wished to hear it, and every one, thanks to the author's complaisance, had heard it ere long. Nothing but the prohibited comedy was spoken of throughout all Paris. The circle of Madame de Polignac was in raptures with "Figaro," and incessantly teazed the king to grant the permission for having it performed. Louis, who had heard it in private, refused, and sent a lettre de cachet, forbidding even the private performance of the comedy, at the moment it was going to take place before an eager and fashionable circle. This prohibition excited the most vehement indignation. The king was styled tyrant and oppressor by the very courtiers whose reactionary feelings afterwards caused his ruin. Beaumarchais exclaimed in his anger, "The piece shall be acted, even though it should be in the very choir of Notre Dame!" He consented, however, to soften down a few passages; and, with the aid of the Vaudreuils and the Polignacs, succeeded in wringing the long-wished-for permission from the king. "Figaro" obtained almost unexampled success; and the seventy-second performance was as crowded as the first. The court did not dare to suspend the representations of the comedy, but unwisely imprisoned the author!

The permission of acting the "Marriage of Figaro" had been so reluctantly granted, that no one thanked the Polignacs for their share in obtaining it. The queen, though she had nothing to do with this affair, was blamed by those who feared the effect of the profligate comedy. Whatever occurred, ill fortune attended her still. Even the encouragement which she gave to music and her countryman Gluck was productive of a strife memorable in the annals of French society. Though the genius of Gluck was recognised, the party opposed to the queen promptly brought forward, as his rival, the Italian Piccini. Two inimical factions henceforth divided the town. In the streets, in coffee-houses, private dwellings, and academies, the important point was warmly discussed. "Are

you a Gluckist or a Piccinist?" was now a question universally addressed; and, according as the answer might be, friendships were confirmed or angrily dissolved. The quarrels of the Jansenists and the Molinists, or even those of the philosophers and the devotees, had never possessed so much importance, or been marked with half the acrimony now raised in the name of the gentlest of all arts.

Gluck and music were the only objects of Marie Antoinette's encouragement. She neglected painters and their productions, though both were patronised by several of the Parisian ladies. Madame de Genlis, in particular, was always surrounded by some of the most talented artists of the day. Between this lady and the queen there unfortunately existed a very bitter animosity. In general, Marie Antoinette did not like the women of her time, and was not liked by them. When she gave birth to her first child, (the Duchess of Angouleme,) the Duchess of Chartres, on paying her the customary visit, besought her majesty to accept the excuses of Madame de Genlis, who was too ill to appear. Marie Antoinette haughtily replied that, although the celebrity of Madame de Genlis might cause her absence from court to be noticed, her rank did not authorise her to send in excuses. Madame de Genlis had already been slighted by the queen, who disliked her character, and cared little for her writings; wounded to the quick by this last affront, she criticised with some acrimony the tastes and habits of Marie Antoinette. The queen spoke with equal asperity of Madame de Genlis's conduct and literary productions. Courtiers embittered the quarrel. Those who wished to render themselves agreeable to the queen discovered that they could do so by turning Madame de Genlis into ridicule; whilst others, equally uncharitable, immediately repeated to the authoress all the keen epigrams and satirical remarks uttered, at her expense, in the apartment of Marie Antoinette. This treatment was greatly resented by Madame de Genlis, who was easily irritated, and not so easily appeased. She disagreed with the rigid Madame Necker, and kept up a vehement quarrel with her impassioned daughter; she

wrangled for a long time with the aristocratic party, and ultimately fell out with the revolutionists. The philosophers she held in utter detestation, since the Academy, instead of bestowing the Montyon prize on one of her works, gave it to Madame d'Epinay's "Conversations d'Emilie." The old Duchess of Grammont, whose temper was probably soured by disappointed ambition, confessed herself delighted at this result, and declared—"That she hoped Madame de Genlis would either die of spite, which would be a highly fortunate event, or that, if she survived her disgrace, she would at least write a good satire against the philosophers, which would prove almost as amusing."

Though Madame de Genlis was not generally liked, her position and talents gave her great influence. It would have been politic even for the queen of France to have secured her good-will: an easy task, when a look and a smile from Marie Antoinette were counted high favours! But the queen would not stoop to conciliation. She preferred braving the most influential women of the day to the higher triumph of subduing them by grace and gentleness. The austere and virtuous Madame Necker did not stand higher in her favour than the pliant Madame de Genlis. Louis XVI. shared her feelings: he accused Necker of allowing himself to be governed by his wife, "who wanted to make of France a quarrelsome republic like her own Geneva." This was a general impression. Some of the caricatures of the day represented Necker sitting at his dinner, whilst his wife stood by him, on account of her infirmity, and read him a moral treatise. Madame Necker was far too prudent to display the open animosity of Madame de Genlis, but she blamed the frivolousness and imprudence of the queen in language which, though covertly expressed, was far more effective.

It is sad and true that, though Marie Antoinette could inspire her chosen friends with feelings of heroic devotedness to her person, she never knew how to conciliate the general sympathies of her own sex. Proud and unbending, when she

saw her share of popularity and social influence pass into the hands of other women, she made desperate efforts to win back the failing power; but she would never stoop to accept it from those whom a few gracious words might have rallied to her cause and made her own for ever.

CHAPTER V.

CONFUSED STATE OF FRENCH SOCIETY—THE DIAMOND NECKLACE—MINISTERS FAVOURED BY THE QUEEN—MADAME DE STAEL—MADAME DE CONDORCET.

On the eve of her great Revolution—that is to say, from 1781 to 1789—France was in that state of confusion and disorder which generally ushers in deep social convulsions. The most opposite principles were recognised and adopted: for in that wide chaos, though there might be much tumult, there was as yet no strife. The contrasts which this state of society presented were often full of singularity.

The French nobles who returned from the American war found the popularity of Franklin and Washington superseded by the Anglomania. This was only a seeming contradiction. The French had willingly inflicted a severe blow on England; but they loved English freedom and constitutional monarchy. Unable to enjoy either, they adopted at least English customs. English clubs, horses, racing, jockeys, and even high boots and plain cloth coats, were not thought unworthy of imitation. The clubs were not political at first; but, by separating the two sexes, they proved fatal to female influence, and changed the spirit of society. It lost its frivolous polish: the graceful effeminacy which had prevailed so long gave way to a new power and energy, well fitted to prepare the nation for the revolutionary outbreak.

This revolution was anticipated by all; but, unlike other social contests, it was expected to be both pacific and pure. Political dissentions, the blood-stained scaffold, foreign war, and civil strife, with all the selfishness, treachery, and fierce passions they arouse, were unsuspected by the enthusiastic

innovators. The nobles spoke of the approaching struggle as of a new fashion introduced and patronised by them. They neither regretted the past nor feared the future. Surrounded by all the privileges of feudal power, they had discarded its flattering customs for the independence of English manners. Their lands and vassals gave wealth and influence; their birth bestowed distinctions unearned by toil and long patience. They could afford to be philosophers, friends of men, and even democrats. This anomaly was only one of the signs of the times. Philosophy, the spirit of old chivalry, republican enthusiasm, licentiousness, and vain affectation of sentiment, often characterised the same individual, even as they characterised the whole nation.

A touch of mystic enthusiasm nevertheless pervaded all this confusion and levity. Mesmer, who perverted to unworthy uses the phenomena of animal magnetism, and Cagliostro, whose wild assertions of supernatural power now excite only a smile of contempt, found numerous disciples in the land of scepticism. The name of the latter notorious charlatan then bestowed a new interest on the memorable affair of the diamond necklace, which brought in contact the names of a profligate cardinal, a noted intriguer, a courtesan, two common sharpers, and the queen of France!

The origin of an event so fatal to the fair name of Marie Antoinette as woman, and to her dignity as queen, lay in the enmity she had long entertained against the Cardinal de Rohan. She knew that, whilst he was ambassador at Vienna, the cardinal had opposed her marriage with the dauphin, and she came to France greatly irritated against him. In a letter to D'Aiguillon, Rohan ridiculed the affected sorrow of Maria Theresa for the partition of Poland. D'Aiguillon shewed the letter to Madame du Barry; she took it from him, and, being then in open hostility to the dauphiness, communicated it to all her friends. Marie Antoinette understood that the letter had been originally addressed by the Cardinal to Madame du Barry herself. This wounded her to the quick. When she became queen, and the ambassador returned from Vienna, she

treated him with marked disfavour. It was said, and believed, that there also existed another motive for this pointed aversion, and that the cardinal—a vain, handsome man, noted for the profligacy of his conduct—had early conceived a passion for Marie Antoinette, which she perceived, and thus severely checked. Her coldness nearly drove him to despair. It was in vain that, with almost boundless wealth at his command, he could revel in all the luxurious pleasures his unscrupulous conscience so freely allowed; in vain that he belonged to one of the first families of the land, and held the highest dignities of the Gallican Church, with broad lands and many fair revenues: so long as he lacked the sunshine of the queen's smiles, and Versailles remained forbidden ground for him, life was shorn of all joy and delight. Ten years passed away, and wrought no change in this strange infatuation. The cardinal caught distant glimpses of the queen, and hoped against all hope for the return of her favour, whilst she relentlessly persisted in the manifestations of her haughty displeasure.

A clever intriguing woman, named the Countess de la Mothe Valois, who represented herself as being descended from the royal house of Valois, and who was so in reality, audaciously resolved to profit by this weakness of the cardinal. She was pretty, insinuating, and easily succeeded. She made him believe that she secretly possessed the favour of the queen, and offered to reconcile him to her. He eagerly accepted, and wrote a long letter of justification, which Madame de la Mothe undertook to deliver. She soon returned him a forged reply, in which Marie Antoinette was made to profess a complete alteration in his favour, although she declined, for prudential reasons, to see him yet, or manifest any external change in her bearing. The excess of the cardinal's joy rendered him even more credulous than he was by nature; although he believed in Cagliostro, alchemy, and the philosopher's stone. He had seen Madame de la Mothe enter and leave the palace through private entrances, and on this authority he readily admitted all that she told him concerning her intimacy with the queen.

Madame de la Mothe derived considerable sums from the Cardinal de Rohan, through means of forged letters, in which the queen requested him to assist her with various loans of money for acts of private charity. The sums, which the delighted cardinal eagerly forwarded, were all intrusted to Madame de la Mothe, as well as two hundred letters which he addressed to Marie Antoinette. When he at length became impatient for more substantial marks of the queen's good graces, Madame de la Mothe bribed a tall, handsome courtesan of the Palais Royal, named D'Oliva, to take the part of Marie Antoinette, whom she greatly resembled. This girl was easily persuaded that the queen wished her, in a frolic, to assume her character in the gardens of Trianon, and exchange a few words with a nobleman.

On a dark evening of the month of July 1784, D'Oliva, attired in white like the queen, was introduced by Madame de la Mothe into the gardens of Trianon, where, seated in a shaded bower, she awaited the approach of the cardinal. He came, and sank down at her feet in a transport of joy. He had only time, however, to take a rose with which she presented him, and listen to a few gracious words which fell from her lips, when her accomplices made a sound of approaching footsteps, and thus disturbed the interview. The false queen rose in well-feigned alarm, and hastily retired, leaving the cardinal chagrined at the brevity of this meeting, but full of intoxicating hopes; for, in his soaring wishes, he aspired both to the favour of the queen and the love of the woman. The sums which Madame de la Mothe had drawn from the cardinal enabled her to live in handsome style, and to persuade various persons that she was really in favour with the queen. Boehmer, the jeweller, besought her to persuade her majesty to purchase the necklace of magnificent diamonds, which he had collected together with infinite toil and trouble for Madame du Barry. A writer, whose depth and penetration have thrown much light on this doubtful subject, thus elaborately describes this queenly ornament:—

"A row of seventeen glorious diamonds, large almost as

filberts, encircle, not too tightly, the neck a first time. Looser, gracefully fastened thrice to these, a three-wreathed festoon, and pendants enough, simple, pear-shaped, multiple star-shaped, and clustering amorphous encircle it, enwreathe it a second time. Loosest of all, softly flowing round from behind, in priceless catenary, rush down two broad threefold rows, seem to knot themselves, round a very queen of diamonds, on the bosom: then rush on, again separated, as if there were length in plenty; the very tassels of them were a fortune for some men. And now, lastly, two other inexpressible threefold rows, also with their tassels, will, when the necklace is put on and clasped, unite themselves behind into a doubly inexpressible sixfold row; and so stream down, together or asunder, over the hind-neck, we may fancy, like lambent zodiacal, or aurora-borealis fire."*

This magnificent necklace was worth 1,800,000 livres. The queen had several times refused to purchase it, thinking it too costly and profitless an ornament. "We have more need of seventy-fours than of necklaces," she once nobly replied to Boehmer's earnest solicitations. Madame de la Mothe, to whom he applied, seemed disinclined to interfere in the matter; but carelessly hinted that the Cardinal de Rohan might effect the object he so ardently desired. She had already insinuated to the cardinal, that Marie Antoinette longed passionately for the splendid necklace, without daring to purchase it openly. Rohan eagerly offered to render her this service. Many seeming difficulties were raised; but at last Madame de la Mothe said she had procured the consent of the queen, and, on the 29th of January 1785, an agreement was drawn up between the Cardinal de Rohan and Boehmer, by which the latter agreed to deliver up the necklace to the cardinal for the sum of 1,600,000 livres. This agreement was taken to Versailles by Madame de la Mothe, who returned it with the addition, *Bon—Marie Antoinette de France.* Neither the cardinal nor the court-jeweller noticed that the words *de France*—which belonged to the royal family of France only

* Carlyle's Essays, vol. v., p. 20.

—could not have been used by an Austrian princess. On the following day the necklace was delivered to Madame de la Mothe by the cardinal. Cagliostro, in whom he placed great trust, was consulted on this occasion, and prophesied that this affair would end most fortunately for his eminence.

Madame de la Mothe's husband in the meantime took the diamonds to England, and there parted with them separately. Nothing was discovered until the first instalment became due. The money not being paid at the appointed time, it was claimed by Boehmer. The queen denied all knowledge of the necklace; an explanation ensued, and the matter was immediately laid by Marie Antoinette before her husband. On the 15th of August 1785, which was also Assumption-day, the Cardinal de Rohan was summoned to the royal presence. His confused manner and hesitating replies conveyed to Louis XVI., who shared his wife's prejudices against him, a strong impression of his guilt. The shame of having been so grossly duped might, however, have explained the cardinal's bearing. The king ordered him to be taken into custody; he had time, nevertheless, to say a few words in German to his attendant, who hurried to Paris, and reached his master's hotel before the officers of justice. The most important of the cardinal's papers, such as his correspondence with Madame de la Mothe, and the forged letters of the queen, were instantly destroyed by his confidant, the Abbé Georgee.

The Cardinal de Rohan's trial, in which Madame de la Mothe, D'Oliva, and Cagliostro were also implicated, lasted nine months, and created immense scandal. The queen was accused of being the accomplice of Madame de la Mothe, and of having joined in this intrigue for the purpose of ruining the cardinal; who, instead of being ridiculed as a foolish dupe, was elevated to the dignity of a victim of court machinations, and of Marie Antoinette's implacable hatred. The whole aristocracy exclaimed against the enormity of bringing a man of his rank to trial. Madame de Marsan, though nearly allied to him, alone behaved nobly, for she purchased and

suppressed one of the numerous libels against the queen, to whom this trait was never even known.

The trial did not only give rise to the most injurious surmises against Marie Antoinette, it inflicted on monarchy a deep irremediable stain. The queen might be pure as snow; but the prestige of royalty had been broken. The Church suffered more deeply still: the spectacle of one of its first dignitaries leaguing himself with a man like Cagliostro, and a woman like Madame de la Mothe, in order to obtain the favour of the queen of France, was a disgrace which deeply affected the sincere religious party. They felt that her own faithless servants were the greatest foes of religion.

The Parliament acquitted the cardinal; less, it is said, from a belief in his innocence, than from a feeling of animosity against the queen. On learning the acquittal, Marie Antoinette wept bitterly. How deeply must the consciousness of her failing power have come over her then? Madame de la Mothe was publicly whipped and branded. She afterwards escaped to England: her end is a mystery still. Notwithstanding his acquittal, the cardinal was ordered to retire to Auvergne. He afterwards became a member of the Constituent Assembly, and ultimately emigrated.

The tears which Marie Antoinette shed on hearing of the acquittal of De Rohan did not subdue her haughty temper. She continued to place herself in opposition to the general will, until she brought down on her head the vengeance of the whole nation. Still yielding to the advice of the Polignac coterie, she succeeded in having Calonne appointed minister. Dexterous, unprincipled, holding as his first political dogma, that to curtail the magnificence (*i.e.*, extravagance) of royalty was rank heresy, Calonne was indeed the man after a true courtier's own heart. Places and pensions were freely showered down during his prodigal rule; which hastened—but could scarcely render more certain—the ruin of the state. Calonne was at first in great favour with the queen. He encouraged her extravagance, instead of checking it like Turgot or Necker. She once sent to consult him on a

financial matter of some importance. "Tell her majesty," he promptly replied to the messenger, "that if what she asks is difficult, it is already done; if it is impossible, it shall be done." Thus encouraged, the queen, notwithstanding the impoverished state of the finances, purchased the magnificent seat of Saint Cloud from the Duke of Orleans: a step which was much censured. Ere long, however, she became dissatisfied with Calonne: her pride was wounded at the undue ascendancy the Polignacs sought to exercise over her. She perceived too late the difference between a favourite and a friend. She was also hurt to see that Madame de Polignac became cordial or distant in her behaviour according to the favours granted or refused to her friends. If she loved her still, it was because she knew her nature to be pure and good; but the charm of her intercourse had vanished. The extravagance of Calonne at length compelled him to retire from office: he left the finances in a deplorable condition. It was generally expected that Necker would be recalled; but such was not the case. The queen once more yielded to the fatal advice of a favourite, and her old preceptor, the Abbé de Vermond, mainly contributed to the appointment of Brienne, Archbishop of Sens.

M. de Sens, as he was generally called, according to the custom which designated an ecclesiastical dignitary by the name of his see, was a tall, handsome man, of stately presence and courtly manners, beneath which he veiled a spirit of unconquerable ambition and pride. His conduct was dissolute; his religious principles verged on atheism. He had urged Louis XVI. to check the freedom of the press, and persecute the Protestants. He was a great friend of the philosophers whilst still Archbishop of Toulouse, and frequented the evening parties of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse and the suppers of Madame du Deffand. When Mademoiselle de Lespinasse died, she left him, as a proof of her friendship, a few trifling debts to pay. The popularity of the Archbishop of Sens was considerable with the women of his time, and he availed himself of it with infinite address. His brother, M. de Brienne,

had married a wealthy heiress, on whose rich dowry, and the archbishop's ecclesiastical revenues, they lived with great state and splendour in the handsome castle of Brienne. All the luxuries of art and wealth abounded in this magnificent residence. Brienne was thronged with visitors; men of fashion, and the most beautiful women of the day, hastened to enjoy the delights of a place where balls, comedies, and even easy lectures on natural philosophy, were daily prepared for their amusement. Those persons who had been so fortunate as to receive an invitation, and to spend a few days at this fairy palace, spoke of it with enthusiasm, and spread everywhere the renown of the polite archbishop. Marie Antoinette, with her usual frivolousness, concluded that the object of this general approbation must necessarily be capable of governing the state, and yielded to him her share of influence.

The Archbishop of Sens immediately assumed the imperious tone of a second Richelieu. His measures proved almost as obnoxious to the nobles as to the people. Several women, influenced by motives of private pique, withdrew their support from him, and contributed to his unpopularity. Amongst these was Madame de Coigny, noted for her beauty, harsh voice, and caustic wit. So great was her power, that Marie Antoinette somewhat jealously said, "I am only queen of Versailles; Madame de Coigny is queen of Paris." This lady had spent some time at Brienne, and greatly desired to act a conspicuous part in one of the plays performed for the amusement of the guests. Her disagreeable voice induced the archbishop to evade the request. She never forgave him, and became his professed enemy. After a series of measures which only proved his total incapacity for affairs, the archbishop ended by convoking the States-General (8th of August 1788) and retiring from the ministry. Few men in office had rendered themselves so heartily detested; yet the queen, with her usual haughtiness and imprudence, affected to treat him with more favour than ever. Yielding to her earnest entreaties, Louis XVI. solicited and obtained from the Pope a cardinal's hat for the discarded minister; to whom Marie Antoinette

sent her portrait, and addressed several letters expressive of her friendship and esteem. These letters were subsequently published in 1789, and did the queen infinite injury. They tended to shew how opposed she was to the spirit of reform, and led many to believe that her fatal influence might cause her weak husband to share in those feelings.

After the dismissal of the archbishop, Necker was recalled. His popularity had considerably increased since 1781. The weakness of his system, which consisted in reforming the internal condition of France by the administration suited to a private household, or to a banking-house, was not so forcibly felt then as now, when nations have passed through the bitter experience of revolutions. His extraordinary popularity was at its height when he entered on the duties of his second ministry, as the recognised advocate of the liberal principles which agitated the whole of French society.

The power of Necker was considerably strengthened by the influence which his daughter was beginning to acquire as Madame de Staël. In 1786, Germaine Necker, who was then in her twentieth year, married the Baron of Staël-Holstein, ambassador of Sweden at the French court. He was a handsome, commonplace man, considerably older than her, but his rank, high birth, and Protestant faith, recommended him to her parents. Germaine Necker, seeing how ardently they desired this union, married M. de Staël from feelings of duty. Shortly after her marriage the new ambassadress was presented at court. Her literary celebrity caused her appearance there to excite a good deal of attention. It was noticed, as an extraordinary circumstance, that she missed one of her courtesies, and that the trimming of her dress was partly unfastened. A few days afterwards, she paid a visit to the Duchess of Polignac, and forgot her cap in her carriage : she was in consequence stigmatised as a very strange, eccentric woman.

The extraordinary genius of Madame de Staël was already fully recognised. The Count of Guibert, the pitiless lover of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, was one of her most impassioned

admirers, and thus portrayed her, under the name of Zulmé. —"Zulmé is only twenty years of age, and she is already the most celebrated priestess of Apollo. Her incense is to him the most welcome: her hymns are those he prizes best. . . . Her large dark eyes sparkle with genius; her ebon hair falls in waving locks on her shoulders. Her features are more characteristic than delicate, and bear the impress of a higher destiny than that which usually falls to the lot of her sex."

Young and striking in aspect, if not beautiful,—though many found beauty in her intellectual countenance, lit up by a look in which beamed all the inspiration she afterwards ascribed to her imaginary Corinne,—Madame de Staël was destined to exercise a more than common power. She came at the time most fit for the part she took. Her passion and energy would have been superfluous in the frivolous world of which her youth beheld the last traces, but they suited well the stormy times on which France was entering. Her rank and origin were likewise in her favour: the nobly born could associate freely with the Swedish ambassadress; the liberals saw in her the daughter of the popular minister, Necker. But her genius, and its irresistible fascinations, were arguments more powerful still. Ere long, the most eminent men of the day eagerly gathered around a woman whose admirable and enthusiastic improvisations on political and literary subjects held them all spell-bound. This display has been censured as unfeminine in Madame de Staël; but it was always redeemed, in the opinion of those who knew and heard her, by being so perfectly unaffected and genuine. It was a great and glorious gift freely exercised: eloquence was a part of her being; to divest herself of it would have been impossible. M. de Narbonne, Talleyrand, the old Duchess of Grammont, La Fayette, Siéyès, Madame de Lauzun, the Princess of Beauvau, Madame de Poix, Vergniaud, and most of the men who afterwards became the Girondins, Madame de Coigny, then in open hostility with the queen, successively appeared in her drawing-room, and acknowledged the power of her commanding genius. In vain did Madame de Genlis ridicule her per

son and her works, and appeal to the praises of Buffon as the test of her own superiority; it was felt, almost by intuition, that no comparison could exist between these two women, divided as they were by the wide boundary which distinguishes genius from talent.

Only one woman seemed likely to share the power of Madame de Staël, and she owed this apparent equality, not to her intellectual acquirements, though they were of no mean order, but to her beauty, position, and political principles. This lady was Sophie de Grouchy, Marchioness of Condorcet, born in 1765, a year before the daughter of Necker, and married, like her, in 1786. Madame de Condorcet was a woman of a daring and independent turn of mind, full of talent, and as exquisitely beautiful as Madame de Staël was eloquent: and beauty had then, as it has ever, a deep and winning eloquence of its own. Madame de Staël was painfully conscious of her personal deficiencies, and often declared that she would give half her genius to be as handsome as Madame de Simiane: a lady noted for the poverty of her intellect and the incomparable loveliness of her face and person. Notwithstanding her beauty, Madame de Condorcet could not have struggled against the genius of Madame de Staël, had they been rivals; but such was not the case. Their political principles, if not identical, had the same tendency towards freedom. Madame de Condorcet had derived from her husband all the philosophic and democratic principles which distinguished the disciple of Voltaire and the friend of Turgot. Like him, she was enthusiastic in the liberal cause, and favoured with all her power the progress of the rising revolution. She received the most ardent philosophers and politicians of the day; and the conversations which were held at her house were noted for their grave and abstract nature. Condorcet was a man of some scientific eminence; his wife shared all his tastes, and assisted him in the literary portion of his labours. Notwithstanding this similarity of feeling, they presented externally a very striking contrast. Condorcet, middle-aged, grave, and cold, concealed a burning enthusiasm beneath this calm as-

pect, and had been characterised by D'Alembert, who knew him well, as a volcano covered with snow. Madame de Condorcet, on the contrary, young, beautiful, and excitable, abandoned herself without reserve to her political prejudices, and to every passion of the moment. The society which met at her house had all the characteristics of the times. On the eve of a revolution, full of hope, energy, and daring thought, it cast away, with proud disdain, the elegant frivolousness which had distinguished it so long. Independence of opinion and manner, ardent discussions, and often fatal quarrels, had replaced the love intrigues and puerile amusements of a past which was never more to return.

The extreme activity which pervaded society during the last days of monarchy proved very fatal to the court, and especially to Marie Antoinette. Instead of conciliating the influential women of the day, she seemed determined to alienate them from her cause. She had conceived a sort of haughty dislike for Madame de Staël,—probably because she was the daughter of Necker,—and she displayed this feeling with all her customary imprudence. Madame de Staël, on the other hand, did not like the queen; she believed her to be a vain and frivolous woman, whose folly was ruining the state. No one then foresaw the weight of misery beneath which Marie Antoinette was to expiate her errors; and the Swedish ambassadress used, in her strictures, a degree of severity which, could she have seen through the gloomy future, she would have sorrowfully forsworn. Personal motives, and a distrust of the queen's policy, which was then felt by the whole nation, thus united Madame de Coigny, Madame de Genlis, Madame de Condorcet, Madame Necker, and Madame de Staël, the five most influential women of the day, in a powerful political opposition against the queen. Madame de Staël, passionately devoted, as she was, to her father, deeply resented the evident hostility with which he was regarded by Marie Antoinette. On the day that he was recalled to office, Madame de Staël went to Versailles, and the same evening informed her friends, with some bitterness, that the queen had

far more graciously received Madame de Canisy, the niece of the dismissed Archbishop of Sens, than the daughter of the recalled minister. It was impossible to know Marie Antoinette, and not to feel such conduct to be intentional; and as impossible not to resent the slight, which, when she pleased, the haughty queen could so well convey with one disdainful glance.

It was more than imprudence in Marie Antoinette to act thus: it was pure folly. She could not but perceive that she had lost both the affection and the esteem of the nation. "The Austrian woman" was the gentlest epithet applied to her now. The Assembly of the Notables, convoked by Calonne, shewed her that she had nothing to expect but reproach and insult from the first orders of the state. That these feelings were shared by the people, she could not doubt. Beyond the narrow circle of the Polignac coterie, she met everywhere with gloomy and estranged looks. When she walked in the gardens of Saint Cloud, the very children followed and insulted her. Allusions against her were eagerly seized in every theatre; and the lieutenant of police had to beg that she would no longer come to Paris, as he could not answer for the consequences of her presence. Every class seemed bent on ascribing to her the misery of the nation: the nobles calumniated her—the people called her Madame Deficit.

Marie Antoinette bore all in haughty silence; but every insult, every proof of hatred she received, sank deeply in her heart. Her beauty, once so fresh and dazzling, gradually faded away; her cheek became pale and thin; her eyes grew dim with weeping, and with nights of anxious vigils. The sunny smile, which had lent so great a charm to her expressive countenance, visited it no more. If she saw not yet the terrible future, she was haunted with the shadow of dark, foreboding thoughts; and a secret terror filled her heart whenever she asked herself what fate awaited her, her husband, and her children? Through every fear and trial, she maintained, however, a bearing more composed, and more truly royal, than that which had marked the days of her splendid pros-

perity. But though she had the heroism which braves, Marie Antoinette lacked the prudence which wards off evil. No suffering, no danger, could subdue her wilful nature. She struggled, even unto folly, against the tide of popular feeling; and her enemies read her features well when they said, that through all their traces of sorrow, they still bore the impress of unconquered pride. She waited her fate undismayed: alone against a nation.

PERIOD THE FOURTH.

THE REVOLUTION.

CHAPTER I.

THE REVOLUTION AND MARIE ANTOINETTE.

THE convocation of the States-General—rendered imperative by the deplorable condition of the country—was, in itself, the herald of a revolution. Louis XVI. welcomed this important crisis with a feeling of relief, and fondly thought the burden of royalty over. Marie Antoinette, more clear-sighted than her husband, and far more jealous than he was of the privileges and power of royal rank, learned, with an unusual degree of agitation, that the convocation was granted. On the evening of that eventful day, she was standing in the recess of a window, with her face turned towards the gardens of Versailles. The chef de goblet had brought her a cup of coffee, which she sipped abstractedly; her bearing was thoughtful and grave. She beckoned Madame Campan to approach, and observed to her: "Grand Dieu! what a piece of news will be made public to-day! The king grants the States-General." She raised her eyes to heaven with evident emotion, and continued dwelling on the subject. She seemed to consider this step as the forerunner of great calamities for monarchy and France, and bitterly exclaimed against the intrigues of the parliament and the nobility, which had reduced the king to this perilous course.

But, deeply as she still resented the conduct of an aristocracy who had both insulted and calumniated her, the queen, nevertheless, sided with that body in their struggle against the people. If anything could increase her unpopularity, it was this. From the opening of the States, the name of "the Austrian woman" became identified with falling despotism. To her hated power every obnoxious and oppressive measure

was ascribed: often with justice; for gentleness and moderation in opposing her enemies ranked not amongst the qualities of Marie Antoinette.

On the 4th of May 1789, the three orders proceeded with solemn pomp to the church of Notre Dame. The procession was magnificent in the extreme. The nobles and the clergy were apparelled with all the splendour of old feudal dignity; but the commoners, in their severe and simple costume, represented the reality of power. The queen was splendidly and royally attired for this occasion; she was received with ominous silence: the only sounds that greeted her ears, were cries of "Long live the Duke of Orleans!" She felt so deeply affected by this premeditated insult, that she nearly fainted away. The thought of having thus betrayed her sensitiveness rankled more in her proud heart than the affront itself. The opening of the States was hailed with different feelings by the various classes of the nation; hope was, however, the prevailing mood. The daughter of Necker, and the wife of the minister Montmorin, beheld together the procession from a gallery. Madame de Staël was full of hope and joy, but her companion checked her transports. "You are wrong," said she, "to rejoice; this event forebodes much misery to France and to ourselves." The words were prophetic: the husband of Madame de Montmorin was massacred in the prisons on the 2d of September; she herself suffered on the scaffold with one of her sons; another was drowned; her eldest daughter perished in prison; and the youngest, unable to survive such misfortunes, died of a broken heart!

With the States-General began that long revolutionary struggle which brought on the fall of monarchy; but which did not end until, weary of her own excesses, France at last resigned herself to the despotism of Napoleon. In this contest, of which she became one of the most unhappy and illustrious victims, Marie Antoinette took an active part, until the 10th of August 1792. During those three years, the reckless disposition of the queen, and the overwhelming force of circumstances, made her seek the alliance of almost every party:

at first, in the vain hope of checking the revolution, and when that was evidently impossible, for the desperate necessity of securing, at least, a temporary respite. Whenever she was personally exposed to danger, Marie Antoinette shewed herself the heroic and fearless daughter of Maria Theresa; but in her political conduct there was neither heroism nor greatness. She opposed the revolution vehemently and blindly, and without seeking to work the salvation of royalty through any settled plan of conduct. By mere unflinching resistance, she hoped to conquer a revolution which the master genius of a Mirabeau afterwards vainly sought to subdue. When events, too significant to be misunderstood, shewed her the powerlessness of her efforts, the queen had not the magnanimity to confess herself conquered, and to yield frankly to the revolution she could not control. Too haughty and noble-minded, however, to stoop to conciliate those whom she hated, she adopted the policy that might have enabled her formerly to baffle court intrigues; she bribed a few of her opponents, forgetting that her real enemy was the nation. She considered the revolution as the ambitious struggle of a few headlong men, when it was the awakening of a long-oppressed people; she sought to check, not to guide its course. The narrow-minded coterie who had urged her to the mistaken policy of resistance, soon abandoned her and Louis XVI. to their destiny; and, by their intrigues at foreign courts, exasperated the whole nation against its sovereigns.

Marie Antoinette began her imprudent course by opposing Necker, then at the height of his power. The court party detested him, as the representative of liberal ideas and the favourite of the people. The people knew this well. When Necker was attacked, they felt against whom the blow was directed; and they resented the insult by deeds of wild violence, which stained the pure cause of liberty. The coercive measures which the queen and her advisers induced the king to adopt, on the 23rd of June 1789, caused Necker to send in his resignation. On the 24th, a deputation from the nobility waited on the king, the princes, and the queen, in

order to thank them for their support. Marie Antoinette received them very graciously, and shewing them the dauphin, whom she held in her arms, told the deputies that she gave him to the nobility, and would teach him to consider that illustrious body as the firmest support of the throne. But so strong was the popular feeling against those obnoxious measures, that, on the very same day, Marie Antoinette was compelled to send for Necker, beseeching him to resume his office and allay the excitement: she promised, at the same time, that his advice only should be followed in future. The queen soon broke her word. She was not insincere, but her inconstancy often made her appear such. Weakness produced a similar effect in her husband. Yielding to her advisers, she persuaded the king not to grant any further concessions to the popular party. One of her most partial historians* confesses that the troops which were gradually concentrated around the assembly, in order, no doubt, to intimidate it into compliance, were summoned there by the king, in pursuance with his wife's energetic representations. These measures were followed by the sudden dismissal of Necker on the 11th of July. With a strange mixture of weakness and audacity, the court party, though thus defying the nation by discarding its favourite minister, did not dare to commit this act openly.

The king made Necker promise that he would leave France instantly, and without mentioning his departure to any one. Necker obeyed. He dined as usual with his family and his friends, and talked with his customary cheerfulness: no one had the least suspicion of the truth. After dinner he communicated the matter to his wife, stepped with her into his carriage, apparently in order to take his daily airing; but he soon bade the coachman alter his course, and, having procured a proper conveyance, left the kingdom with the utmost speed and secrecy. His departure was not known even to Madame de Staël until the following day. The continued pouring in of troops around Versailles, and the dismissal of Necker,

* Weber.

created a profound sensation in Paris. The town was soon in a ferment; conflicts with the soldiery took place; the whole people rose to arms; the Bastile was stormed and compelled to surrender on the 14th of July, and thus, three days after the attempted court reaction, a serious revolution had been accomplished. The king was compelled to yield to the tide of popular feeling: on the 15th, he proceeded to the assembly, made concessions, and was led back in triumph to his palace. In compliance with the wish of the crowd, he appeared on a balcony with his wife and children. Marie Antoinette held the dauphin in her arms and embraced him, amid repeated cheers. A revolution, illegal in form and just in its object, which was the triumph of the majority over the will of the few, was thus sanctioned by royalty itself. But neither on the side of the court, nor on that of the people, was the reconciliation sincere. Threats against Marie Antoinette and Madame de Polignac were uttered amidst the loud acclamations of the crowd, and the demagogue, Saint-Huruge, was heard menacing the throne under the windows of the royal palace.

Marie Antoinette knew well the danger of the crisis, and besought Madame de Polignac and her relatives to leave the kingdom. They immediately emigrated, with the princes of Condé and the Count of Artois. The departure of Madame de Polignac deeply affected the queen; she forgot their political differences, and only felt that the woman she had once loved passionately, and to whom she still felt warmly attached, was leaving her, probably for ever. Their last interview was sad and affecting: with dark forebodings, and unavailing tears, they parted—to meet no more on earth. On subsequently learning the death of her royal mistress, the ex-favourite died of grief. So much was the name of Madame de Polignac detested, that she was compelled to leave France disguised as a femme de chambre. On passing through the town of Sens, she was stopped with her friends by an excited crowd, who eagerly asked if France had yet got rid of the Polignacs. The travellers replied in the affirmative, and were allowed to pro-

ceed. At Bâle, Madame de Polignac met Necker, who was proceeding to Coppet. From the fugitive favourite, the exiled minister learned the storm his banishment had raised. They were still speaking of these strange events when Necker received two letters; one from the monarch, and the other from the assembly; both recalling him to his post. He obeyed, and his return through France was one long scene of triumph. When he reached Paris, and presented himself at the Hôtel de Ville, he was received with fervent enthusiasm. It was indeed, "one highest culminating day, with immortal vivats, with wife and daughter kneeling publicly to kiss his hand."* It is easy to imagine with what heartfelt pride Madame Necker and Madame de Staël thus publicly paid homage to the object of their common idolatry. Overpowered with joy at her father's triumph, Madame de Staël fainted away.

Whilst the people and their minister thus triumphed, the court party was filled with dismay. On the 17th of July the king resolved to go to Paris, in order to allay the popular excitement. The queen, although a prey to the most gloomy apprehensions, restrained her tears as she saw him depart, and shut herself up with her family in her private apartments. She sent for some of the persons attached to her court; but, seized with a sudden terror, they had all fled from Versailles. A silence, deep and ominous like that of death, now filled the deserted palace; where, with straining ear and beating heart, Marie Antoinette awaited the arrival of the couriers, who every hour brought her news from her husband, and reported to her the events of his journey. So little did she hope for his return that, in case he should—as she fully expected—be detained, she had prepared an address for the National Assembly, throwing herself and her children on its protection, and beseeching, above all things, to be allowed to join the king. Her joy on his safe return from Paris was unbounded; but even in that moment of felicity wounded pride was blended with all her gladness. A cloud passed over her

* Carlyle—"French Revolution," vol. i., p. 321.

haughty brow, when she learned that Bailly, the new mayor of Paris, had remarked, in his address to Louis XVI., "Henry IV. conquered his people, and here are the people conquering their king." "Conquering!" she repeated indignantly. Alas! whilst thus contesting the reality of popular power, was she not yielding to it herself? Was she not compelled to dismiss and send from the kingdom even her old frivolous Abbé de Vermond, lest the mère fact of having been in her favour should doom him to destruction?

The lesson which the taking of the Bastile might have inculcated was soon forgotten by Marie Antoinette. Before three months had elapsed, she again attempted a reaction, which gave rise to the disgraceful events of the 5th and 6th of October: disgraceful alike for the sovereign and the people. On the 23d of September the regiment of Flanders arrived at Versailles, and gave a splendid dinner to the gardes du corps on the 1st of October. The king granted them the hall of the opera for the occasion. The queen had been urged to appear and honour the guests with her presence; but she prudently declined. This judicious resolve was overruled by one of the courtiers. Towards the close of the repast, when the heads of the revellers were heated with wine, the queen, the king, and their children appeared in the scene of festivity. Their presence excited the greatest transports. "*Richard, O mon Roi,*" was enthusiastically sung, and the health of the royal visitors drunk amidst deafening cheers. The usual toast to the nation was intentionally omitted, the tricolour cockade was trampled under foot, and the white cockade, the badge of loyalty, triumphantly displayed. When intelligence of this banquet, of the insults to the revolutionary principles by which it had been accompanied, and of the sanction these circumstances had received from the royal presence, reached Paris, the news created a feeling of deep indignant resentment. As though determined to make matters still worse, the court party persisted in their folly. A breakfast, consisting of the fragments left from the dinner, was given on the 2d of October: the same defiant spirit was

displayed by the guests, whilst all the court ladies busied themselves in sewing white cockades, which they distributed to the imprudent partisans of absolute royalty. This was a time of great scarcity, almost of famine, in Paris. The rich banquet given by the regiment of Flanders, the imprudent menaces of quelling the revolution uttered by the officers, the contrast the supposed abundance and profusion of Versailles offered to the misery of the capital, produced deep irritation; and, on the 5th of October, an insurrection of women took place. It has been asserted that this insurrection was premeditated: that the Orleans faction had directed it against the queen's life, in order to obviate the inconvenience of her regency, in case the king should be deposed; but there is every reason to believe that the movement was wholly spontaneous.

On the morning of the 5th of October, a large body of women, consisting chiefly of the refuse of the populace, seized on the Hôtel de Ville. Headed by the usher Maillard and Théroigne de Méricourt, they proceeded to Versailles. Théroigne was a beautiful courtesan, who acted a conspicuous part in every insurrectionary movement of those times. She was a native of Méricourt, near Liege; her parents were farmers in easy circumstances, and gave her a good education. She was only seventeen when a nobleman of the neighbourhood seduced and soon abandoned her. She fled to England, then came to Paris, saw Mirabeau, Sièyès, Brissot, Des Moulins, and Romme, and plunged into an agitated and dissipated life. From the first she espoused, with passionate ardour, the extreme revolutionary principles. Dressed in a red riding-habit, with dark flowing locks beneath a hat and plume, a sabre by her side, and two pistols in her belt, she headed every popular tumult. Her eloquence, bravery, and recklessness fitted her for the part she had chosen. At the storming of the Bastile she appeared first on the tower of the fortress; and the conquerors, struck with her courage, decreed her a sabre of honour on the breach. She now placed herself foremost amongst the women on the 5th of

October. The band, amounting to several thousand, proceeded to Versailles, apparently without any fixed object. They insisted on seeing the king, and seized tumultuously on the hall of the assembly; but although they manifested a very riotous disposition, they were kept in tolerable order. Their threats against the queen excited, however, the alarm of Louis for her safety, and he earnestly urged her to depart with her children; but her spirit was of that order which rises with the storm: she firmly refused to abandon her husband. "I know," said she, "that it is my life they seek; but I am the daughter of Maria Theresa, and I have learned not to fear death."

On the morning of the 6th, a body of men and poissardes proceeded to the badly-guarded palace. A conflict between them and the gardes du corps immediately began. With the instinct of hatred the infuriated populace rushed towards the apartment of the queen: she had retired to rest at a late hour, ordering her attendants to do the same. They, fortunately, disobeyed, and remained with their own women seated near her bed-room door. "About half-past four in the morning," relates Madame Campan, "they heard horrible yells and discharges of fire-arms. One ran in to the queen to awaken her, and get her out of bed. My sister flew to the place from which the tumult seemed to proceed; she opened the door of the ante-chamber which leads to the great guard-room, and beheld one of the body-guards holding his musket across the door, and attacked by a mob, who were striking at him; his face was covered with blood. He turned round and exclaimed, "Save the queen, madam: they are come to assassinate her!" She hastily shut the door upon the unfortunate victim of duty, fastened it with the great bolt, and took the same precaution on leaving the next room. On reaching the queen's chamber she cried out to her, "Get up, madam! do not stay to dress yourself: fly to the king's apartment." Marie Antoinette rose in haste, and did not escape without difficulty.

When La Fayette had succeeded in clearing the palace, all peril was not over for the queen. She sat near a window

talking to M. de la Luzerne, one of the ministers, when a ball from below, intended for her, struck the wall close to her. M. de la Luzerne, without seeming to heed this fact, rose, and, continuing his discourse, placed himself quietly between the queen and the window. "Nay, sir," said she, with dignified calmness, and signing him to resume his seat, "this is not your place, it is mine." During the whole of that dreadful day she displayed the same lofty heroism. On the first sounds of the conflict, Necker, closely followed by his wife and daughter, hastened to the palace. The people, in the courts below, were asking vehemently that the royal family should return with them to Paris. The king promised to comply, and shots were fired in token of rejoicing. It was at this moment that the queen appeared in the great saloon. Her fair and luxuriant hair fell in disorder around her pale countenance; but never had her whole aspect borne the impress of such commanding majesty. "Everything in her person struck the imagination," observes Madame de Staël. The people asked, with loud shouts, that the queen should appear on the balcony as well as the king.

The expressive countenance of Marie Antoinette betrayed what fate she dreaded, but she unhesitatingly advanced towards the balcony, between her two children. The ominous cry of "No children!" arose below her from the vast marble court, then full of armed men. She understood those fatal words, and gently pushing back the children into the apartment, returned to the balcony, unprotected and alone. "Should I die, I will do it!" had energetically exclaimed this daughter of Maria Theresa; and with hands folded on her bosom and eyes raised to heaven, she now stood there awaiting her fate, in heroic and sublime resignation. But, her hour was not yet come: years of sorrow were before her still, and a doom far more sad, far more bitter than the assassin could inflict, awaited the hapless queen. One man pointed his gun towards her, but another of his companions struck it down: the calm heroism of the woman subdued the anger felt by the crowd against the imprudent queen; and when La Fayette stepped forward and respectfully raised her hand to his lips, the jus-

tice of the homage was acknowledged by a loud cry of "Vive la Reine!"

When Marie Antoinette left the balcony and re-entered the saloon, she approached Madame Necker, and said to her, in a voice rendered inaudible by convulsive sobs, "They are going to compel me and the king to return to Paris, with the heads of our gardes du corps carried on their pikes before us." Two of the gardes du corps had indeed been murdered, and their heads were borne in triumph to Paris by the poissardes; but fortunately not within sight of the unhappy sovereigns. Before leaving the royal palace of Versailles for ever, the queen observed, with much emotion, to one of her attendants, "We are lost: dragged away, perhaps to death: when kings become prisoners, they have not long to live." The journey from Versailles to Paris lasted five hours; a promiscuous mob of men and women accompanied the royal carriage; they shouted, sang, carried loaves of bread on their pikes, and exclaimed, in allusion to the king, queen, and dauphin, "We are bringing the baker, his wife, and the little apprentice." Notwithstanding the fatigue and sufferings of that eventful day, the self-possession of Marie Antoinette did not desert her. The king, on arriving at the Hôtel de Ville, said to the mayor, Bailly, "that he always came with pleasure to his good city of Paris." "And with confidence," quickly added the queen. They proceeded to the Tuileries, which had not been inhabited for nearly a century, and was in a most dilapidated condition. When, on the following day, Marie Antoinette received her court and the corps diplomatique in those dismal and antiquated apartments, she could hardly speak for her tears. Those whom she addressed were scarcely less moved. She apologised for being obliged to receive her guests in the room where her children had spent the night. "You know," said she, "that I did not expect to come here." And as she spoke thus, her fine and irritated countenance was such as when once seen could not easily be forgotten.*

Her beautiful and gentle sister-in-law, Madame Elizabeth,

* Madame de Staël.

bore this change with a more serene resignation. Although this charming princess was not, it is said, of a naturally amiable disposition, her deep and sincere piety had so completely eradicated her early defects, and imparted to her whole being something so holy and so pure, that, notwithstanding her youth and loveliness, the chief feeling which she inspired was veneration. Indifferent to her own fate, she was evidently not so with regard to the fate of her brother, whom she loved passionately, and of his wife and children. But her anxiety for them was tempered by religious submission: less heroic than the queen, she was not less noble or devoted.

Whilst monarchy was thus rapidly approaching its last perilous crisis, French society was likewise undergoing a marked transformation. Ever since the opening of the States-General, politics had absorbed every conversation. When the greatest social questions were at stake, what interest could be felt in the literary discussions of narrow coteries? The hall of the National Assembly had become the wide arena where the struggle for power and popularity was now carried on. Women thronged the galleries, as spectators of this great contest, and watched with deep interest the last throes of that expiring society with which their old power was fast passing away. But when, after the 6th of October, the assembly was transferred to Paris, the beautiful and high-born ladies, who had looked down from the *tribunes* on the stirring scene below, gradually vanished, and were replaced by ferocious and hideous poissardes; who, from always bringing their knitting with them, acquired the name of *tricotteuses*. The dawn of the revolution, and the taking of the Bastile had, however, been hailed with rapturous enthusiasm by the élite of French society. When the old fortress fell, its ruins offered a strange and varied aspect: tents and cafés arose, as by enchantment, amongst the wrecks of towers and bastions; fashionable women came in their carriages to visit that once gloomy and silent spot, now as gay and crowded as Long Champs. Here the still lively and brilliant Madame de Genlis brought her princely pupils, to read them moral lessons over fallen des-

potism: as a proof of her entire sympathy with the popular cause, she afterwards wore suspended around her neck a miniature Bastile, made of real Bastile sandstone. Madame de Staël, Mirabeau, the young Chateaubriand, then wholly unknown, likewise visited the last ruins of feudalism. Statesmen, actors, poets, artists, and men and women of the world, thronged together to the place, amidst the din and laughter of the workmen, who joyously demolished the vast edifice. A ball was afterwards given on the spot where the once-dreaded fortress had stood.

But notwithstanding the sympathy which they manifested for the spirit of the revolution, at least in its early stages, the women of those times exercised a very slight degree of influence in comparison with the power they had formerly possessed.

For some time Madame de Genlis still drew around her a portion of the most elegant society of the times. Every Sunday she received a political and literary coterie in the apartments she occupied with her pupils at Bellechasse; but as the revolution progressed, her circle gradually became narrower. Those persons who did not wish to attach themselves to the Orleans faction, dreaded her tact and insinuation, and avoided frequenting her saloon. Many affected to be repelled by her reputation for intrigue, and her enemies—who were numerous among the royalists—industriously circulated reports most injurious to her reputation. These reports were countenanced by the suspicions which the Duchess of Orleans had at length expressed with regard to the connexion between her husband and the governess of her sons. The duchess also complained that the affections of her children were estranged from her by Madame de Genlis, whom she accordingly wished to resign her functions. Both the duke and the governess refused to accede to this; the duchess was loud in her complaints, and the public, who esteemed her virtues, and pitied her for being united to a profligate husband, threw all the odium on Madame de Genlis.

The power of Madame de Staël and Madame de Condorcet

was likewise declining. The partisans of constitutional monarchy rallied for a while around the gifted daughter of Necker, but her sway was as brief as that of the principles she professed. Madame de Condorcet belonged to the republican party, and received men of democratic opinions; but, although she was visited by the notorious Anacharsis Clootz, (who called himself the "Orator of the Human Race,") and was styled by him, in compliment to her great charms, "the Lycean Venus," she did not exercise a wide or lasting power. When her husband fell with the Girondists, she sank into total obscurity, notwithstanding her talents and beauty. Though many women figured in the revolution, there are in reality but three who can be said to have acted in it a really important part, and whose names are imperishably linked with the history of their times. These three women are, the queen, whose long and unavailing struggle for monarchy brought her to the scaffold; the republican Madame Roland, who perished with the Girondists; and the noble-minded Madame Tallien, who hastened the fall of Robespierre, and avenged so many pure and illustrious victims. The time for speaking of Madame Roland or Madame Tallien is not yet come, and we must now return to Marie Antoinette. If, in her political conduct, there will be, as usual, much inconsistency and imprudence to deplore, yet shall we ever find her sublime and heroic in the hour of danger.

CHAPTER II.

MARIE ANTOINETTE AND THE FALL OF THE MONARCHY.

THE principal errors and misfortunes of Marie Antoinette may be attributed to the extreme difficulties of her position. As a woman, she could exercise only an occult power, peculiarly unsuitable to her open nature. Impetuous and energetic, she was fit for instantaneous action, but ill adapted for giving the calm counsel on which another could act. The hesitating and apathetic temper of her husband would alone have sufficed to counteract whatever good she might have effected. Louis XVI. only knew how to suffer passively. Marie Antoinette early saw this, and, in spite of the respectful reserve with which she always alluded to the king, it was easy to perceive that a feeling akin to bitterness rankled in her mind when she thought on the fetters of her position. Could she have acted freely and alone, the revolution would have been sooner over: she could not have saved monarchy or the monarch, but their fall, not being delayed so long, would not have been so overwhelming and so deep. But this very energy of Marie Antoinette—which, had she been independent, would have hastened the crisis—prolonged it, because she was not free, and gave it the dangerous aspect of a struggle. When she had exhausted every form of opposition, she perceived too late that resignation might have been the wisest course. There is regret for past imprudence in those words which she addressed, shortly before the 10th of August 1792, to one of her confidants: "As for myself," said she, after alluding to the passive temper of the king, "I could do anything, and appear on horseback were it needed; but that

would be furnishing weapons to the king's enemies: throughout all France a cry against the Austrian and the rule of a woman would be raised instantly. By coming forward, I should, moreover, reduce the king to a humiliating and inferior position. A queen," she added mournfully, "who, like me, is nothing in her own right—who is not even regent—has but one part to act—to wait the event silently, and prepare to die."

During the three years which elapsed from the events of the month of October 1789, to the fall of monarchy in August 1792, Marie Antoinette had acted in direct opposition to the principle of passive submission. The outrages to which she was subjected, from the moment that the Tuileries became the residence of the royal family, embittered her against the revolution and its partisans. Shortly after the events of October, she visited, with the king, a large manufactory in the faubourg Saint-Antoine. They were received with much enthusiasm. "See, madam!" observed La Fayette, who accompanied the royal couple, "how good this people are when one comes to meet them." "But are they so when they come to meet us?" bitterly asked Marie Antoinette. The queen was resentful; but she disdained vengeance. A prosecution was instituted by the Châtelet against the instigators of the insurrection of the 5th of October, and a deputation waited on the queen, in order to hear from her lips an account of what she had personally seen and suffered. In answer to their inquiries, she replied: "I will never inform against any of my subjects. I saw all; I knew all; and I have forgotten all."

The instinctive policy of Marie Antoinette seems to have been to save the royal power alone. She stood in equal dread of the revolutionists and the emigrants. To yield to the former was ruin; to accept the aid of the latter was degradation. She recoiled with distrust from either course, until events became too imperious to allow her to persevere in her aim at solitary influence. We, accordingly, find her alternately holding conferences with Mirabeau, Barnave, and

even Danton; or placing in foreign intervention her only remaining hope of safety. Her characteristic and interesting connexion with Mirabeau began in the month of May 1790. It would have commenced much earlier, but for the scruples of the king; who objected to form even a private alliance with a man so notorious for his immorality. Marie Antoinette, more clear-sighted and less rigidly scrupulous than her husband, at length overcame his objections.

The first interview of the queen and the great orator had all the mystery of romance. One evening, in the month of May, Mirabeau left Paris, apparently for the purpose of riding to the country house of his friend Clavière; but he soon turned towards Saint Cloud, entered the park by a private entrance, and found the queen waiting for him, alone, in a shady and retired spot. "With a foe of ordinary capacity," said she, "with an everyday enemy, I should now be guilty of a very foolish, a very injudicious step: but with a MIRABEAU!"— The grace, dignity, and energy of the queen produced a powerful impression on Mirabeau. With a woman's ready tact she noticed this, and also observed to Madame Campan that the expression of "a Mirabeau," which she had employed intentionally, had not failed in its desired effect. The close of their interview alone is known. "Madame," then exclaimed Mirabeau, "whenever your illustrious mother, Maria Theresa, honoured one of her loyal subjects with an interview, she never suffered them to depart without according to them her royal hand." The queen, with a queen's grace, held forth her hand; Mirabeau, with a king's dignified elegance, knelt and fervently kissed it: that kiss shot strength through his frame, and, starting to his feet, he cried, with native self-confidence,—

"Madam, the monarchy is saved!" *

This meeting gave Mirabeau a high opinion of the queen. He emphatically observed to Dumont: "She is the only man of the family!" an expression which Napoleon afterwards

* "Mirabeau: A Life-History," p. 221, vol. ii.

borrowed, and applied to Marie Antoinette's daughter, the Duchess of Angoulême. Mirabeau also perceived, that to act on the king it was necessary to influence his wife, since she alone could rouse him to action. It was, therefore, to Marie Antoinette that he addressed his advice and correspondence, and gave detailed explanations of his plans for the restoration of monarchical power. That he even intended her to act a conspicuous part in carrying out his projects, is apparent by a phrase which occurs in one of his letters: "The moment may come when it will be necessary to see, that which we may see, *on horseback, a woman and a child:* these are family traditions, familiar to the queen." The noble nature of her new ally strongly attracted Marie Antoinette; but she had scarcely sufficient firmness of purpose to adhere to his plans. She consulted Mirabeau, as she consulted so many others, in the vain hope of deriving the desired benefit from their advice, without binding herself to follow it implicitly.

A year after the commencement of their intercourse, Mirabeau died, and whatever hopes the queen might have founded on his aid, perished with him. He died, happily for his fame, at the precise time when his powerlessness to allay the storm he had helped to raise would have been felt; but though his life could not have stayed the revolutionary torrent, his death contributed to accelerate its course. From that moment the position of the royal family became daily more precarious. The king, with his habitual indecision, knew not which party to favour. More fearless and energetic, Marie Antoinette held all concessions weakness, and hated disguise with all the force of a frank nature. To smile on those she disliked, and not to dare to favour those she loved, was a moral thraldom she could not endure. She longed to break her chains; to conquer back that royal sceptre, which had escaped from her husband's feeble hand; and to subdue that stern revolution, which had begun with insulting her name and threatening her life. The dangers which surrounded her husband, her children, and herself, strengthened her resolve. She was in constant expectation of seeing her apartments

invaded by the populace. A sound of musketry, which appeared to come from the palace itself, one night roused Louis XVI. from his slumber. He hastened to the queen's apartment; it was vacant: he proceeded further, and found his wife by the dauphin's bed, clasping the child in her arms. "I was at my post," she calmly observed, in reply to his inquiries. The alarm proved to be false: but such was the state of anxiety in which Marie Antoinette lived. The royal family at length resolved upon flight: a fatal and imprudent step.

Marie Antoinette intrusted the conduct of this important enterprise to the Count of Fersen, a young and chivalrous Swede, who had conceived a romantic passion for the beautiful captive queen. His sovereign, Gustavus III.; had already proclaimed himself her knight, and vowed to defend her; the Count of Fersen endeavoured to save, at least, the life of the woman he loved. His measures were at first attended with great success. On the night of the 20th of June 1791, the members of the royal family, all carefully disguised, left the palace by different issues. Their flight was not discovered until the next morning. Favoured by this advance, the fugitives might have reached their place of destination in safety, if they had not been recognised by Drouet, the son of a postmaster, who caused them to be intercepted at Varennes. In spite of their protestations, they were compelled to alight at the house of the syndic, a grocer named Sausse. It was night; but the positive assertions of Drouet, and the characteristic features of both the sovereigns, betrayed them. Louis XVI., still persisting in denial, was rudely contradicted by the men around: with that strong sense of dignity which never deserted her, Marie Antoinette, seeing that all was over, stepped forward, and addressing Sausse and his companions, authoritatively observed: "Since you acknowledge him for your sovereign, treat him as such." Her look and tone silenced these men. Louis, casting aside all disguise, confessed his rank, and begged not to be detained; representing the evils that would accrue to the country from that detention.

But it was in vain that the king pleaded and commanded by turns; in vain that the queen, now haughty no longer, weepingly begged of Madame Sausse to remember her feelings as a wife and a mother, and intercede with her husband. Tears and entreaties proved useless, and the royal family retired to a narrow room above the shop to spend the night: but not to rest. In that night the fair hair of Marie Antoinette turned white with grief.

It was a melancholy journey for the fugitives from Varennes to Paris. The shouts and execrations of the people accompanied them all the way. An old nobleman having approached the royal carriage, and expressed his sympathy for those within it, was murdered before their eyes. A priest would have shared the same fate, but for the interference of Barnave, one of the two deputies sent by the National Assembly to protect the king. Young, eloquent, and popular, Barnave had figured, since the opening of the States, as the rival of Mirabeau, and the vehement opponent of the court. Péthion, who shared his present mission, was likewise a member of the left, and a republican; as he informed the king he was bringing home a captive. The two deputies sat in the same carriage with the royal family. Péthion behaved with rude insolence; Barnave with unfeigned sympathy and respect: he gazed with surprise on the woman he had judged from the reports of her calumniators; he saw her beautiful and dignified in her queenly sorrow, and, with the enthusiasm of a generous heart, he secretly vowed to protect and defend her. There is not, perhaps, a circumstance more honourable to Marie Antoinette than the passionate admiration which, without effort, she inspired in men of every rank and party, whenever they could approach her. Her power was gone; tears and suffering had faded her once-dazzling loveliness: the devotedness she excited was not paid to the woman or to the queen; it was the instinctive tribute which a fine and generous nature must always call forth. During the whole of the journey homewards, she behaved with a courage and self-possession which increased the admiration of Barnave. She calmly alighted

at the Tuileries, regardless of the hootings of the populace; and, unconquered even in that hour, haughtily refused the offered protection of the Viscount de Noailles, one of the members of the aristocracy who sided with the people.

The unsuccessful flight to Varennes greatly aggravated the position of the royal family. They were so closely watched, that it was only by stealth the queen could see her husband. National guards remained in her room, even at night, and she protested in vain against this gross indecency. Notwithstanding this close surveillance, she found means to communicate with Barnave. Alone, in an obscure room of the palace, she often waited whole hours for the young deputy, with her hand on the lock of the door. The sincerity of Barnave's devotedness had deeply touched Marie Antoinette. She sympathised with his youth, his talent, and even with the ambition which had proved so fatal to her. Whilst she declared, "that she could never forgive the nobles who had commenced the revolution, she excused the young commoner for having ardently embraced a cause which opened a path to his legitimate ambition." The king and Madame Elizabeth shared those feelings. The queen did not, however, adopt the plans of Barnave. He proposed constitutional prudence and moderation; but for this Marie Antoinette instinctively and justly felt that it was now too late. Had this plan been adopted earlier, with all sincerity and truth, the revolution might, perhaps, have been checked, and the constitution firmly established. We say *perhaps;* for on examination, it is difficult to avoid perceiving that the revolution was merely a political struggle for freedom and rights long denied: it was a social war of the suffering and exasperated masses against their former oppressors. A constitution which fettered them with a king, and checked the progress of the revolution, was therefore as little acceptable to an immense number of individuals, as it was distasteful to the sovereigns themselves. The party of the constitutionalists and the moderates was, however, large and powerful; and it might have held back the democratic element, but for the violence

of the royalists, the constant hesitation of Louis XVI., and the reactionary tendencies of the queen. Owing to these auxiliaries, the nation lost all faith in the efficacy of constitutional monarchy, and was ripe for a republic by the time the constitution was finished.

The queen was, therefore, both more practical and more clear-sighted than Barnave, when she rejected as useless his plan of adhering faithfully to the constitution; but she erred in thinking a reaction possible. After sacrificing his popularity to the royal cause, Barnave had the mortification to perceive that the sacrifice had been made in vain, and that the queen now relied exclusively on the aid of emigrants and foreigners. Marie Antoinette reluctantly adopted this course. She had never loved the aristocracy, and she well knew the degree of favour and submission they would expect, if they succeeded in quelling the revolution. A few months after the dissolution of the National Assembly, Barnave left Paris, and parted from the queen. She assured him that, in the event of a reaction, he should still possess her friendship and esteem. Barnave mournfully pointed out the fallacy of her hopes; told her he knew that he had risked his head in her cause, and risked it in vain; but enthusiastically added, that, so far from repenting aught he had done, he should hold himself fully repaid if she would only grant him the honour of pressing to his lips her royal hand. The queen, with much emotion, extended her hand towards him: he seized and kissed it fervently. Thus they parted, to meet no more; but to perish within a few days of one another, the queen and the commoner, on the same scaffold.

The hopes of Marie Antoinette did not rest solely with the emigrants: she believed that the excess of the anarchy she foresaw would lead to the re-establishment of order. It was so; but not until she, and all those she loved, had fallen victims to the popular anger so imprudently encouraged. In the month of November of the year 1791, the year of the flight to Varennes, La Fayette and Péthion contended for the mayorship of Paris. The former was a constitutionalist, the

latter a republican. Marie Antoinette disliked La Fayette, as being one of the first men who had humbled monarchy. She accordingly opposed his election, and spent large sums to secure that of his rival. It was perhaps to her efforts that Péthion owed his return.

This conduct was extremely imprudent; for since the acceptation of the constitution by the king, the difficulties of his position had materially increased. Friends and enemies seemed leagued alike against the peace of the sovereigns. Friends complained that their advice had not been followed; court ladies threw up their places in the royal household with disgust, because privileges were abolished by the new constitution, and duchesses were deprived of their traditionary stool or tabouret. Marie Antoinette was hurt with this conduct, and contrasted it probably with the behaviour of Madame du Barry. From the commencement of the revolution the ex-mistress of Louis XV. distinguished herself by her zeal in favour of the queen; at whose court she knew, however, that she could never hope to appear. At one period, hearing that the queen was in want of money, she offered her the costly and magnificent diamonds she had received from the late king. The queen thanked her and declined. After the events of the 6th of October, Madame du Barry, at the risk of her life, received the wounded gardes du corps who had defended the apartment of Marie Antoinette, and attended them with the utmost devotedness. More affected by this trait than if she had received a personal favour from her former antagonist, Marie Antoinette commissioned one of her friends to go and thank Madame du Barry in her name.

Fortunately for the honour of the French female noblesse, Madame du Barry was not the only titled lady who braved real peril in the cause of royalty. The beautiful Princess of Lamballe no sooner learned that the queen was surrounded with danger, than, leaving her safe asylum in England, she returned to France, and claimed her post of superintendent of the queen's household. Not long before the 10th of August, she observed to one of her friends: "As the peril grows

greater, so do I feel more strength. I am ready to die: I fear nothing." Other women emulated her devotedness; but those were solitary instances; and the intrigues of the narrow-minded coteries who still gathered around Marie Antoinette, might well, when joined to the cabals of her enemies, justify the passionate exclamation she addressed to her brother: "Is it fated then, that I, with the blood I am come of, with the sentiments I have, must live and die among such beings?"

With the Legislative Assembly, which succeeded to the Constituent, arose a new and powerful party, destined to hasten the course of the revolution, and to perish amongst its earliest victims. This party (that of the Girondists) yielded to the influence of several remarkable women. Whilst its leading members still affected constitutional principles, they submitted to the power of Madame de Staël and Madame de Condorcet. These two ladies succeeded in procuring the appointment of the Count of Narbonne as War Minister. He was a young, handsome, and brilliant nobleman, and a passionate attachment was said to be at the root of the interest testified for him by the daughter of Necker and the wife of Condorcet. But gradually, and as their policy assumed a more republican shape, the Girondists fell off from Madame de Staël, who still remained faithful to her father's doctrine of constitutional monarchy. A Madame d'Udon, now well nigh forgotten, and a clever actress, named Mademoiselle Candeille, attracted them for a time; their power was quickly effaced by that of Madame Roland, a woman whose name is imperishably connected with the history of the Girondist party. It was this woman whom General Dumouriez endeavoured to fascinate, when he succeeded Narbonne, in March 1792. He saw her power over her friends, and wished to rule them through her. But if Madame Roland was graceful and lovely as a Frenchwoman of the eighteenth century, she was also as austere as a Roman matron. Dumouriez, unprincipled and accustomed to the intrigues of the old régime, smiled at the earnestness of her republican enthusiasm: leaving her to her bright visions of the future, he secretly resolved

to turn his attention to the more practicable object of saving monarchy and the queenly Marie Antoinette. Could he do this, he knew his fortune would be secure for ever; and, though ambitious, the daring and brilliant Dumouriez was also capable of devoted and chivalrous feelings: the task of delivering from the toils of her enemies a proud and oppressed queen was as soothing to his vanity as the long vista of honours its accomplishment would open to his soaring spirit.

His first care on his appointment was, therefore, to seek an interview with Marie Antoinette. He found her alone, pacing her apartment agitatedly. Her cheeks were flushed, and she looked irritated. She was probably so at the appointment of Dumouriez, who had the reputation of being a vehement Jacobin. "Sir," said she, walking up towards him, "you are now all powerful; but popularity is brief. I will deal frankly with you. Neither the king nor myself submit willingly to the constitutional innovations which have been forced upon us. Choose now the part you wish to take." To this strange and imprudent speech, Dumouriez replied by pointing out the necessity of appearing to adopt the extreme principles it was so desirable to control: such, he hinted, had already been his policy. But Marie Antoinette either disliked this course or mistrusted the general, and she received his advances coldly. Not discouraged by this repulse, Dumouriez, whose interest in the fate of the courageous queen was increased by her daring and imprudent temper, continued to urge the point; and, falling at her feet, passionately exclaimed, as he pressed her hand to his lips,—"O madam, allow yourself to be saved!" Marie Antoinette, thinking he acted a part, remained inflexible. She certainly erred in not giving the plans of Dumouriez a fair trial. Of all the members of the Girondist ministry, he was the only one who did not aim at a republic: the only one really devoted to the king.

The unhappy monarch daily found, in his advisers, enemies ready to watch and expose his errors. He unfortunately gave them a pretence for opposition, by refusing to sanction the decree against the nonjuring priests. The ministers remon-

strated; he dismissed them, but could not find men fit to succeed them: the sense of his helpless and desperate position then struck him so forcibly that for ten days he scarcely uttered a word. The queen, filled with grief at his deplorable state, threw herself at his feet, and conjured him, in her name and that of her children, to arouse himself. "If perish we must," she energetically exclaimed, "let us perish with honour, striving for our cause; and let us not remain to be stifled in the walls of our palace."

The organised insurrection of the 20th of June 1792, which followed the dismissal of the Girondist ministry, seemed destined to humble and degrade royalty before it should be crushed for ever. An infuriated populace broke into the palace, insulted the royal family, and committed every violence short of assassination. Louis XVI. rose into sublimity through mere passive courage; Marie Antoinette was heroic and dignified; Madame Elizabeth devoted. On the first sounds of the tumult, the young princess broke from the grasp of her women and rushed to the "œuil de bœuf," where she found the king surrounded by an angry crowd. She made her way towards him, and clasped him passionately in her arms. "The queen! it is the queen!" exclaimed a hundred voices at once, and at that hated name arms rose and glittered threateningly towards her. She waited her expected fate in calm and silent resignation; the hurried explanations of a few officers of the palace alone saved her from instant death. "Ah! why," she mournfully exclaimed, "did you undeceive them? Perhaps, by dying for the queen, I might have saved her."

Bitterly conscious that her presence could only add to the peril of her husband, Marie Antoinette was compelled to remain with her children in her own apartment. Her only defenders were a few devoted nobles, timid attendants, and the Princess of Lamballe; who, in spite of the queen's entreaties, had hastened to her post on the first rumour of danger. For two hours the populace vociferated at the door for admittance. It was at length thought prudent to comply.

The doors were thrown open; the queen, her children, and the women having previously been entrenched in the recess of a window, behind a wide table. Here, for three hours, Marie Antoinette, with unsubdued courage and incomparable dignity, stood listening to the insults of her enemies as they passed before her. The women especially addressed her in the fiercest and most disgusting language. "Did I ever injure you?" at length asked the queen, of one of these furies. "No," she answered; "but you are the foe of the people." "You have been deceived," mournfully said the queen. "Alas! I was happy when you all loved me." "Forgive me," said the woman, bursting into tears; "I see that you are good." Even Santerre, the fierce hero of the faubourgs, was touched at the sight of undeserved ignominy so royally endured. By looks and broken words he intimated his sympathy to the queen; and from that time held secret intelligence with her. After being indulged in their tyranny for five hours, the crowd were at length dispersed. The emotion of Marie Antoinette, on beholding her husband, betrayed itself by hysterical shrieks. For some time the king vainly endeavoured to calm her; when he had at length succeeded, he perceived that he still wore the coarse red cap he had been compelled to assume in order to save his life. He cast it away indignantly, bitterly exclaiming, "Ah! madam, did you come from Vienna to behold me thus degraded?"

From that day to the 10th of August, the sovereigns lived in the full consciousness of their approaching fate. They were persuaded not to touch the meals prepared for them, and to partake in secret of the food provided by a few faithful servants. Their own apprehensions were of a more serious nature. "They will not assassinate me," often observed the king; "they will judge me openly." The queen entertained the same foreboding. "I fear that they will try the king," she said to Madame Campan: "as for me, I am a foreigner; they will murder me. . . . What will become of our poor children!" She wept bitterly. The femme de chambre, remembering how subject she had formerly been to spasms and

hysterics, offered her a composing draught. "Nay," said the queen, with deep sadness, "it is only happy women that can feel nervous. I need no such remedies now." And Madame Campan bears witness that the health of her royal mistress was never so uniformly excellent as when her whole energies were called forth by grief.

Marie Antoinette accustomed herself to the thought of death, but not to the calumnies of her foes. She one day surprised an attendant in the act of superintending her food, lest poison should be introduced into it. "Remember," said the queen, "it is not by poison, but by calumny, that I shall die." Of all the accusations against her, none wounded her so deeply as that of not loving France, and being still an Austrian at heart. Several times she was on the point of leaving her apartment, in order to address the crowd assembled under her window to insult her. "Yes," she passionately exclaimed, pacing her room with hurried steps, her cheeks growing flushed, and her heart swelling as she spoke—"yes, I will go and say to them, Frenchmen, they have persuaded you that I do not love France! That I, the wife of your king, the mother of your dauphin—I, seated on the greatest throne of Europe, and blest amongst the daughters of Maria Theresa; that I do not love France! Ah! what have I to find in Vienna now? Nothing, save tombs! What have I to lose in France? Everything that can render life honourable and dear!" So spoke and felt the unhappy queen; but sad and calm reflection soon shewed her that the appeal she meditated would be made in vain. The evil passions which hatred had so long roused against her, were not to be thus silenced by a few heroic words. Not until many years had passed over her unhonoured grave could even her memory obtain justice, pursued as it was still by those foul calumnies which had hastened her destruction.

The events of the 20th of June filled the noble soul of La Fayette with indignation. He protested against the daily-increasing anarchy, and offered his support to the king. But Marie Antoinette preferred to his assistance the purchased and

doubtful influence of Danton. "Never," she energetically exclaimed, "will we accept the aid of those who first seized on our power. If we perish, we shall perish with dignity: history awaits us." The queen then entertained strong hopes, founded on the approach of the foreign troops. One night in July, while she was looking at the moon, she observed to a friend near her, "When in a month this moon will appear again as we see it now, I shall be free and happy." The reluctance which the sovereigns had long felt to foreign intervention was now over. The grossest insults awaited them in that palace where their predecessors had reigned as kings, and where they were held as the hostages of the people. In the royal chapel, where they came to pray, the singers greeted them with the Marseillaise or the "Ca Ira." On one of the last Sundays of July they repeated three times, with much exultation, these words from the *Magnificat*: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."* Every day the sovereigns were confirmed in the knowledge of the attack the faubourgs intended to make on the palace. One night, when they expected it to take place, the king and Madame Elizabeth agreed not to waken Marie Antoinette, who happened to be asleep. She complained bitterly, on the following day, that whilst his sister was with her husband, she had been allowed to slumber on. "I am his wife," she added, "and I will share every one of his dangers."

The day came at length. The insurrection of the 10th of August was organised by the Jacobins and a portion of the Girondist party. They united for a moment to overthrow royalty and found the republic, and to resume on the very next day their bitter and fatal dissensions. The night from the 9th to the 10th was spent in watchful anxiety by the royal family. The king confessed himself, and calmly prepared for death. More heroic, and less resigned, the queen vainly sought to communicate to him her own spirit of resistance. The pious and gentle Madame Elizabeth needed no prepara-

* Luke i. 52.

tion: the sacrifice of her life had internally been made ever since her devotedness to her brother prevented her from leaving the kingdom with her other relatives.

From the dawn till the close of that eventful day, the behaviour of Marie Antoinette was admirable. She was true to every feeling of her nature; true to the impulses of the woman, the mother, and the queen: whilst the king submitted with pious but ill-timed resignation to his destiny, her courage rose with every new danger. Could she have imparted this heroism to her husband, a desperate, and perhaps successful, resistance would have taken place. His timid, embarrassed, and awkward manner chilled the ardour of his defenders. The queenly bearing of Marie Antoinette, her hurried but still dignified step, the kindling and penetrating glance of her blue eyes, the inexpressible majesty of her pale countenance,—everything in her person,—roused the admiration and enthusiasm of the volunteers before whose ranks she passed. But the emotion was transitory; she could not act, she could not even speak. The king uttered a few hesitating words; heroic and spirit-stirring expressions rose to the lips of his wife, but they died unspoken: she would not provoke a contrast that might wound his dignity; now more than ever she felt that her part was "to submit silently, and prepare to die." Carried away, however, by the excitement of the hour, she once seized on a pair of pistols, and presented them to her husband, exclaiming, as she did so, "Now is the time to shew yourself a king;" but she found no response in the peaceable soul of Louis XVI.: though he could die with calm dignity on a scaffold, the battle strife was not fit for him. He made no reply, and gently put the pistols away.

The great difficulty of defending the palace was, that amongst the National Guards, who had been summoned to protect it, there were numerous allies of the insurgents. This became apparent when the king entered the gardens in order to review the troops in it: he was hooted, insulted, and very nearly assassinated. The sound of the execrations directed against him reached the apartment of Marie Antoinette: she

rushed to a window; one of the ministers gently drew her back: "Good God!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, "it is the king they are hooting." But such was her self-command that in a few seconds her eyes were dry, and her look had resumed its courageous serenity. According to the words of one who saw her then, "The Austrian lip and the aquiline nose fuller than usual, gave to her countenance something of majesty, which they that did not see her in those moments cannot well conceive." But the manner in which the king had been received by the troops charged to defend him, disheartened even the heroic Marie Antoinette. She still protested, however, against the course recommended by their advisers—that the king and his family, giving up a useless resistance, should retire before the people had invaded their palace, and take refuge in the National Assembly. To yield without a struggle, to seek the protection of those who had brought down the royal power so low, and to forsake the devoted friends who were now ready to shed their blood for their sovereign, seemed to Marie Antoinette the height of degradation and shame. In this her heroic heart inspired her well. What did this concession avail Louis XVI.? He forfeited his crown, his kingly dignity, his life, the lives of his family, of the faithful Swiss, of his noble adherents—for a chance of safety. To risk all, in desperate cases, is often the truest, the highest wisdom.

The cheeks of Marie Antoinette burned with shame as the king at length took this resolve. She followed him in silence, with Madame Elizabeth and her children, to the asylum he had been persuaded to choose. On reaching the Assembly, the royal family were placed in the narrow box occupied by the newspaper reporters. For fourteen hours they remained there, in a stifling atmosphere, listening to the deliberations of the Assembly, and to the sounds of the combat carried on in the palace they had abandoned. The victory of the people, the massacre of the Swiss, and the suspension of royal power, were announced in their presence. The king preserved his mournful calmness; the queen her indignant and unsubdued

bearing. The thought of the friends they had left behind them to perish; of the children who slept unconscious on her knee, and who had lost, in one night, the fairest realm of Europe; of her husband's future fate; of her own; of power and glory gone for ever, might tear her heart with inward agony, but could not cause one sign of weakness to appear on her imperial brow.

For two days this torture was renewed, and the royal family heard, from the same place, the deliberations of the Assembly; every one of which was to them as the knell of their fallen fortunes. Deprived of the commonest necessaries, Marie Antoinette was compelled to borrow twenty-five louis of one of her attendants, and to accept the change of linen for herself and her children sent by the English ambassadress.

On the third day the captives, for such they were now, were conveyed to the Temple: a gloomy, monastic residence, fit prison for a fallen king. Of the five persons who entered this dark dwelling, three left it for the scaffold; one for a foreign land, where she still dwells, a sorrowful exile; the fifth, that pure and lovely child who slept on the bosom of Marie Antoinette, died within the walls of his prison, after a few years of bodily torture and mental degradation, the innocent victim of the crimes and errors of his race, and of the pitiless vengeance of a nation.



Madame Roland.

CHAPTER III.

THE ENGRAVER'S DAUGHTER, MADAME ROLAND.

Two women may be said to have acted a part of more than common importance in the fall of monarchy. The one, as queen of France, by her ill-timed resistance to the revolution; the other by her imprudent enthusiasm as the secret inspirer of the republican party.

Though thus tending, by different means, and with far different objects, to the same end—an end which proved ruin for both, and for the principles they professed—these two women, divided by the vast difference of their social positions, never met. Their struggle was carried on through the men they influenced. This is no vague assertion: the struggle existed; it was a long and severe one—the struggle of energetic reaction represented by Marie Antoinette, and of republican ardour embodied by Madame Roland. The queen was certainly no more the whole reaction than the engraver's daughter was the whole republican party; but it is a significant and important fact, to find in two women the fittest representatives of the great principles which divided France at that momentous period of her history.

We have already dwelt at some length on the conduct of Marie Antoinette; on the imprudence which hastened the fall of Louis XVI.; on the heroism which gave to that fall some of her own native dignity. Whilst the queen thus pursued her ill-advised course, Madame Roland—as lovely, high-spirited, and inflexible as the daughter of Maria Theresa, but with less of her frivolous grace, and with an intellect of more commanding grasp and energy—gathered around her, by the power of her beauty and eloquence, a party of talented and

ardent men, who, yielding to her inspirations, hurried France towards a brief and premature republic.

Beautiful—but of that chaste and almost spiritual beauty which is felt and not portrayed—tall and graceful in person, with a broad, clear brow, blue eyes, deep and thoughtful, dark curling locks that clustered around her neck, and features which, if not strictly regular, were full of fire and expression, Madame Roland exercised an irresistible fascination on all those who approached her. Great as was the power of her personal charms, it yielded to that of her voice. Those who had heard it once could never forget it again. The low, clear tones—so mellow and so deep—haunted them like a strain of exquisite melody through years, long after she who gave them utterance had perished on a scaffold.

But the real source of Madame Roland's influence must be sought in her dauntless and noble character. To the austere heroism of a Roman matron, she united that sensitive and passionate enthusiasm unknown to the ancients; and which has sprung from Christianity, with its fount of boundless love, and its yearning thirst of self-sacrifice. Great, indeed, as her talents were, they were far surpassed by a spirit as heroic, and yet as womanly, as ever tenanted female form. Earnest and deeply convinced herself, she could convince others: her eloquence was not merely the eloquence of genius; it sprang from the heart, and had that power which the heart alone can give.

There is nothing, perhaps, more remarkable in the history of this eminent woman than the simple dignity of her earlier years. We may take her from her obscure youth, and follow her to the scaffold; we still find her the same pure, resolute, and independent being, bearing her unmerited isolation and poverty with the same fortitude which she afterwards displayed in a prison, with the prospect of a certain death before her. It is in this completeness of her character that lies its true, its perfect greatness. Manon Phlipon was born at Paris, in the year 1756, of obscure but respectable parents: her father was an engraver of some talent, and in easy circum-

stances. She was surrounded from her youth by those pure and religious influences which, notwithstanding the scepticism of the age, still lingered in the humble homes of the bourgeois. Even as a child Manon was grave and thoughtful, and displayed an inflexible temper, strange in one so young. She yielded to persuasion, but resisted force or arbitrary will with unflinching obstinacy. When she was about six years old, she was ordered, during one of her childish illnesses, to take a nauseous draught: the disgust natural to her age made her refuse. Her father immediately administered to her a personal chastisement, and imperatively bade her obey; she refused again, and the correction was repeated; a third injunction to drink the medicine was then delivered to her; this time the child said nothing: without even deigning to utter a refusal, she offered herself silently to the expected blow. A gentle prayer and remonstrance from her mother, who then interfered, sufficed to make her comply: overpowering her strong reluctance, she drank off the medicine without hesitation. Struck with the indomitable resolution of his daughter's temper, M. Phlipon yielded her entirely to the management of his wife, and forbore exercising over Manon an injudicious tyranny, which might pervert, but could not subdue, the native energy of her character.

Notwithstanding the inflexibility she displayed whenever she thought herself the victim of injustice or caprice, Manon was habitually of a gentle and serene disposition. Her earliest inclination was a passionate fondness for books and flowers; with both of which she afterwards cheered her prison solitude. A child in years, a woman in the depth and earnestness of her feelings, she might often be seen seated in a recess of her father's workshop, poring for hours over an old volume of Plutarch's Lives; her cheeks flushed, and her eyes swimming with tears, as she dwelt on the immortal pages which have roused and inspired so many heroic spirits. Often then the loved book fell from her grasp, whilst, with brow bent down and clasped hands, she silently wept, to think that she was not born in ancient Sparta or glorious Rome. When her

mother, a woman of remarkable beauty and gentleness, wished to draw away Manon from her books, for which the child, as has already been observed, always felt a strange yearning, she offered her flowers. The volume of Plutarch, however, left her but seldom: she secretly carried it with her, instead of her prayer-book, whenever Madame Phlipon, who was extremely devout, took her to the parish church during Lent. The deeds of the heroic men of old were the "Acts of the Apostles" which steeled the soul of the martyr of liberty. Unconscious of the stern future destined to her, she already envied, perchance, in the dreams of her childhood, that gloomy and yet glorious fate which has revealed her to posterity. And is not character, indeed, that secret power of fashioning life and events which was so long called destiny?

The parents of the young Manon, proud of her dawning beauty and singular talents, strained their means to give her an education worthy of her, though far above her position in life. History, geography, astronomy, chemistry, geometry, Latin, English, Italian, music, dancing, and drawing, were taught her by various masters; who all admired her rapid progress. Her eagerness to learn was such that she often rose, unbidden, at five in the morning, in order to have more time for her studies. But knowledge could not absorb entirely a soul naturally so ardent and enthusiastic. That longing for ideal excellence, which she afterwards placed in stoic endurance and republican freedom, already haunted the mind of the thoughtful child. She wished to understand her own nature, to know the real destination of man, and to prepare herself for it, whatever it might be. This earnestness of purpose is one of the noblest characteristics of her brief existence. In youth, her aspirations took the form of religious mysticism: she gave herself up to prayer and contemplation. Like the beautiful and impassioned Saint Theresa, of Avilar, she early sighed for martyrdom, and dwelt with silent rapture on the unfathomed mysteries of divine love. She entertained for a while the project of embracing a religious life: the sublime devotedness of the Sisters of Charity

deeply touched her heart, already thirsting for self-sacrifice. Yielding to her earnest prayers, her parents allowed her to spend a year in a convent. In this calm retreat her mind acquired the deep and subdued tone of feeling characteristic of those persons who have lived in loneliness and self-communion. She loved to sit apart from her companions, reading and meditating in the solitary avenues of the grounds by which the convent was surrounded, or to muse in the lonely cloisters, over the grave of some departed nun, familiarising her soul with the solemn thoughts of death and eternity. Though the religious sentiments of Manon Phlipon yielded, at a later period, to the scepticism of the age, their purifying influence is to be traced through every stage of her existence. They imparted to her character that tenderness and calm fortitude which marked her domestic and public life, and chastened down the almost pagan heroism of her last hours.

When the young girl—for she was now no longer a child—left the convent, and returned to her father's house, it was to lead a life of severe retirement. For several years she remained wholly secluded within the pure atmosphere of domestic life. Religion, study, and humble household cares filled her quiet existence, and fortified her soul for future struggles. An active correspondence which she then carried on with two of her convent friends, Henriette and Sophie Cannet, shews how calm and obscure was the life she led. The influence of early home is felt throughout every woman's life; her world is essentially inward: it is in the practice of homely duties, in slight but repeated trials and sufferings, that she acquires the subdued gentleness, the habit of calm endurance, which, in more impatient man, are the result of judgment or iron will. Manon accustomed herself to a severe self-discipline. She was early convinced that it is more easy to repress our passions than to satisfy them with due moderation. Whenever her active imagination seemed to her in need of control, she therefore studied geometry and algebra with passionate ardour. The austere turn of her mind made her dislike the licentious novels then in fashion; history even lost its charms for her:

she missed, in the events and characters to which it related, the heroism and dignity she vainly longed to find, and which she sought for a while in the stern doctrines of the Stoics. The change which then took place in her religious opinions confirmed, instead of weakening, this austerity of principle. The philosophical works of the time destroyed her faith, for she proceeded on the erroneous principle that she was bound to prove logically to herself every article of her creed; but her soul was so noble and so pure, that, whilst she gave up her former belief in immortality, and even for a time her faith in the existence of a God, she did not swerve from the severe line of duty she had early resolved to adopt. "The gospel," she writes to her devout friend, Sophie Cannet, to whom she candidly confessed her scepticism, "is the best book I know. I receive this admirable code of morals, and am resolved to conform my whole conduct to it." So anxious was she not to yield to the secret impulse of passion, in her change of belief, that she openly declared, "that when we doubt, we must live as though we believed:" a scepticism very foreign in practice to that of the eighteenth century, whose philosophers believed in little or nothing, and acted according to their faith.

The errors of Manon were those of her understanding: her heart remained pure. She confessed that when she listened to it, exclusively of reason, she believed: it was then that she rejected what she called "the melancholy truths of atheism." But, even when she adopted those desolating doctrines to their widest extent, she conceived herself bound to adhere to the self-denying virtues of Christianity, as fully as if she had been convinced of the immortality of the soul and the future reward of virtue. "Sincerity with myself, and the accordance of my conduct with the system which I shall have adopted (whatsoever it may be) shall, at every time, prove the great object of my care, and the end of my efforts." A noble profession of faith, to which she ever remained true.

Several years were thus spent by Manon in her father's house. The greatest portion of her time she gave to study;

she occasionally amused herself with literary composition, but without the least intention of devoting herself to authorship. "I early perceived," she observes in her Memoirs, "that a female author lost more than she gained, since she was disliked by the men, and criticised by her own sex." This wise indifference to mere reputation did not extend to political matters. In spite of the obscurity of her birth and station, Manon could not feel herself foreign to the welfare of her country. She took a deep interest in the struggles between the Parliament and the crown. Even then she was eminently republican in her feelings and opinions: she resigned herself to an absolute monarchy, but always regretted that she was not born under a democratic government.

The philosophic and popular spirit which had been gradually descending through every class of the nation, now began to pervade the bourgeoisie. Manon adopted eagerly the doctrines of equality and brotherhood, which the philosophers had borrowed from Christianity, even whilst they denied its Divine origin. Like Milton's archangel, "severe in youthful beauty," she gazed with austere displeasure on the follies and vices of the elegant world, which she beheld from afar. Wounded pride, and a sense of her own worth, gave strength to those feelings; but, wherever chance might have placed her, a soul so ardent, and naturally so democratic as was hers, could never have sympathised with the aristocratic indifference and frivolousness of the upper classes. On the accession of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, her parents took her to Versailles. She saw at a distance the splendours of the court, and marked, with contempt and irritation, the idolatrous worship paid by the courtiers to the new sovereign. She thought of ancient Athens, that seat of magnificence and freedom; but she only thought of its just and happy times. She forgot the death of Socrates, the exile of Aristides, and the condemnation of Phocion: "I did not know," she adds, whilst retracing those emotions of her youth in her lonely prison, "that Heaven reserved me to witness errors like those of which they became the victims, and, after having professed

their principles, to participate in the glory of a similar persecution."

These republican feelings increased the stoical nature of her character: she looked upon life as a struggle and a duty. The knowledge of truth and the constant love of excellence were the only boons she asked of Heaven: "O Thou, who hast placed me upon earth," she exclaimed, addressing the Divinity, to whom, in spite of sophistical arguments, her heart ever returned, "grant me to fulfil my destiny in the manner most conformable to Thy holy will and the good of my brethren." But this resignation was not entire. Manon viewed her position with involuntary dissatisfaction. She felt that, with her opinions, she was shackled by the fetters of society: she was not free, she could not act; and, as she passionately exclaimed, addressing her friend, "My whole strength is wasted in vainly endeavouring to shake off my fetters. O Liberty! idol of energetic souls, source of every virtue, thou art but a name for me."

The writings of Rousseau, with which she became acquainted towards this epoch, produced a powerful impression upon her mind: she eagerly seized on whatever his philosophy held of noble and pure, and longed to become acquainted with him personally. One of her friends, desirous of gratifying her, furnished her with an opportunity of paying the admired writer a visit. He had been commissioned to deliver Rousseau a letter; instead of calling with it himself, he gave it to Mademoiselle Phlipon, who, not to take the philosopher by surprise, wrote to him, warning him of her visit, and of its object. Rousseau was probably in one of his gloomy fits when he received the letter of his young admirer; the handwriting was that of a woman, but the conciseness and energy of style, convinced him it was the production of a man. Evidently this was only another trap of his numerous enemies: their malice was apparent in the choice of the agent, a young and, probably, beautiful girl, whom he would not be likely to mistrust.

Unconscious of the suspicions she had roused, Manon, with

a beating heart, left her father's house on the appointed day, and proceeded to the gloomy dwelling in the Rue de la Plâtrière, where Rousseau then resided. She ascended the dark staircase, and paused before the narrow door of the illustrious Genevese, with mingled emotion and respect. She rang the bell; the sour-faced Therese opened the door, eyed her suspiciously, and when she had explained the object of her visit, abruptly informed her that M. Rousseau knew she was not the author of the letter she had sent; that the stratagem was discovered, and that he would not see her; with this she closed the door in her face. Little did Rousseau suspect that the young girl thus unceremoniously dismissed from his threshold, was destined to become one of the first and most illustrious victims of the democratic principles it had been the study of his lifetime to teach.

Whilst the mind of the engraver's daughter was thus absorbed by study and philosophy, her serene and modest beauty attracted much admiration in the vicinity of her father's dwelling. She received various offers of marriage from wealthy tradesmen, but refused them all. The idea of uniting herself to a man with tastes and feelings inferior to her own revolted her: to remain single was, in her opinion, a far more preferable fate. She watched with jealous care over every feeling of her heart, and, as though actuated by a foreknowledge of her high destiny, proudly avoided indulging in anything resembling an unworthy affection. A young man named De la Blancherie produced, however, some impression upon her. He was amiable and talented; she thought his character equal to her own, and invested him with all the heroism and magnanimity in which her ardent soul delighted. Events soon undeceived her: she beheld in La Blancherie an ordinary mortal, and her love vanished with the illusion which had created it. "If I could be induced to love by mere eyesight," she wrote to Sophie Cannet, "I would sooner die of shame than yield to such love." "Burn nothing of what I write to you," she observed, in allusion to the same subject, and betraying that self-severity which ever characterised her; "even should my letters

be one day seen by the whole world, I do not wish to conceal the only proofs of my feelings and my weakness." Manon certainly did not dream, as she wrote this, that her supposition would one day be realised, and that the confidential letters addressed to Sophie Cannet, and carefully preserved by her, would be published, and reveal to the world all the purity and truth of her nature.

The sudden death of Madame Phlipon was the first real sorrow which fell on her daughter. She had loved her mother passionately, and her grief was overwhelming. She gradually sank into a state of languor, which for some time endangered her life. With her good and gentle mother vanished the happiness Manon had enjoyed in the home of her youth. Her father plunged into dissipation and extravagance, and foolishly squandered his daughter's property as well as his own. The grief she felt at M. Phlipon's imprudent conduct, and her own altered prospects could not, however, disturb the cheerful serenity of Manon's temper: she found in all her sorrow that severe pleasure which results from the consciousness of inward rectitude and unmerited reproach calmly endured. She saw clouds lowering over her dark horizon, but she turned not away from the path: she still went onward, "gathering her courage," in her own forcible expression, "as a cloak around her," and calmly waiting the coming of the storm.

Notwithstanding the alteration which she foresaw in her father's circumstances, Manon still inflexibly refused to marry. It was not until her hand was asked by Roland de la Plâtière that her resolve wavered. Roland, whom she had known for several years, was then on the verge of fifty. Tall and thin in person, reserved and somewhat abrupt in his manners, with a harsh voice and a severe look, few would have thought Roland likely to fascinate a young and beautiful woman. Nor was it love, indeed, which Manon felt for him. Since her unhappy experiment with La Blancherie, she held love as a beautiful chimera. But if she did not believe in the reality of this feeling—such as she understood it—she had still faith in friendship and esteem, and held no destiny so

worthy of a woman's ambition as that of wife and mother. Beneath the austere aspect of Roland, she saw and admired a soul worthy of an ancient philosopher by its stern and unyielding virtues. His character was one which the passionate admirer of Plutarch's heroes could well appreciate. In her enthusiasm she even over-rated his qualities; of which a rigid and uncompromising honesty of purpose was the most prominent. If there was in him much to command esteem, it could not be said that there was much to love.

The beauty and superior mind of Mademoiselle Phlipon inspired Roland with a very sincere feeling of admiration. With her approbation, he asked her hand from her father; but M. Phlipon had conceived a secret dislike for the rigid philosopher, and refused to give his consent. Manon acted with sudden and unexpected decision. Several circumstances had long rendered it desirable that she should cease to reside in her father's house; she now left it, and retired to the convent where she had formerly spent a year. The narrow income she had inherited from her mother did not permit her to enter this establishment as a boarder: she only rented a small room, where she prepared her own food, consisting of the coarsest and cheapest vegetables. Notwithstanding the severity of her privations, books, music, and drawing, still yielded her their accustomed pleasures; the only interruption to these occupations was the time she devoted to the mending of her father's linen; for, notwithstanding their separation, she still rigidly fulfilled the most minute of her duties towards him. The sense of freedom, and the secret and severe pleasure she always found in stoic endurance, supported her under this trying dispensation.

Roland took six months to reflect on the course he had better adopt with regard to Mademoiselle Phlipon. When he returned to Paris—he had been at Amiens all this time—he determined on offering her his hand once more. The cool prudence of his conduct had greatly abated her first enthusiasm; but the high esteem she felt for his character, more than the sense of her loneliness, induced her, after a little hesitation, to

accept his offer. They were, accordingly, married in 1781: Manon was then in her twenty-fourth year. In this union Madame Roland found peace and happiness; but such happiness as few women would envy. The love of Roland was a love selfish and domineering, to which he expected every feeling of his wife to yield. So jealous was he of her exclusive affection, that he exacted from her the sacrifice of every female friendship of her youth. This injudicious severity would have alienated from him the heart of any other woman; but the high esteem she felt for her husband, the entire confidence he reposed in her, and her own stern sense of duty, enabled Madame Roland to bear the trials of her new lot. A year after her marriage she proceeded with Roland to Amiens, where he was inspector of several important manufactories. It was there that she gave birth to her daughter and only child, that Eudora whom she so passionately loved.

From the first, Madame Roland assisted her husband in the literary labours he undertook: she transcribed his compositions, corrected the proof-sheets, and, with a humility rare in one of her high talents, seldom ventured to oppose or contradict his opinions. Domestic tasks and walks in the country were the only relaxations of this severe and monotonous existence. From Amiens they removed, after four years, to Villefranche near Lyons, the home of Roland. Here Madame Roland, though not without sufficient annoyance from her husband's relatives—a younger brother and an aged mother-in-law—led the same calm domestic life, in which she found the happiness which attends the accomplishment of a noble and self-imposed duty. Her charity to the poor, the kindness with which she assisted them in their necessities, or attended them when they were sick, soon caused her to be almost worshipped in the vicinity of her new home. The opening events of the French Revolution first disturbed this obscure but happy existence.

The dawn of that great convulsion, so full as it was then of glorious hopes, so free from presentiments of evil, filled the republican soul of Madame Roland with a fervent enthusiasm,

which she communicated to the colder mind of her husband. She knew not what events might bring forth for her; but, whether it was good or evil, she rejoiced with her whole heart at the prospect of the general welfare, and energetically protested her willingness to submit without a murmur to whatever fate might decree. "Blood may be shed," she enthusiastically wrote from her retirement to a friend, "but tyranny will not be re-established: her iron throne is tottering throughout all Europe. The efforts of the potentates can only accelerate its fall. Let it fall! even though we should be buried beneath its ruins! A new generation will arise to enjoy the freedom we shall have bequeathed, and to bless our efforts in its cause." A sort of dim consciousness of the future seemed to haunt her mind even in the calm retreat of Villefranche. As early as 1790, we find her protesting, in a letter to one of her political friends, that "whenever it may be her destiny to die, she shall know how to leave life with feelings worthy of her friends and her country." It is easy to imagine with what feelings of deep interest she watched from her solitude the progress of events. The time was gone when she wept at not having been born in one of the republics of old. Now, she proudly thought, France need no longer envy ancient freedom. Was she not pure, regenerated, and free? The political opinions of Roland caused him to be elected one of the first members of the municipality of Lyons: he was sent to Paris by this body in the early part of 1791. Madame Roland accompanied him to the capital.

Almost immediately after her arrival, she hastened to the Constituent Assembly. She was dissatisfied with all she saw and heard there. Her clear and practical mind soon grew wearied of the endless discussions which marked every meeting. She had little faith in constitutional monarchy. That a nation which could regain its entire freedom, should surrender a considerable portion of it to a monarch formerly possessed of unlimited authority, and never regret it; and that this monarch, educated in the idea of divine right, should be satisfied with exactly the portion of power given him by the nation,

and never seek for more, seemed to her equally dangerous and improbable. The event shewed that she was in the right: that abuses had extended too far for constitutional monarchy to prove successful in France, and that a republic was almost the only possible solution of numerous difficulties. Roland had, amongst the members of the extreme party, many connexions who were as dissatisfied with the prospect of constitutional monarchy as Madame Roland. The beauty of this remarkable woman, her enthusiasm and eloquence, soon exercised a powerful fascination over her husband's friends. Péthion, Buzot, Brissot, and Robespierre, met four times a week at her house, to discuss the measures it was expedient for them to adopt in the National Assembly. Madame Roland took no share in those discussions: like Madame de Maintenon, when Louis XIV. and his ministers met in her boudoir, she sat apart, busy with some piece of needle-work, or even writing letters, a deeply-interested though silent observer of all that passed. The tediousness, the hesitation, which marked these lengthy and fruitless conversations annoyed her decisive and energetic mind. She longed to utter her own brief and practical opinions on the subjects discussed, but that feeling of womanly reserve, which never forsook her, always checked the words as they rose to her lips.

Notwithstanding her apparent calmness, she was already seized with the revolutionary fever. She felt, as must have felt all those who were cast on that stormy sea, a new intensity in the power of existence. "We live ten years in twenty-four hours," she wrote to one of her friends, in July 1791. And it was well that it should be so; for those whose hours sped along thus swiftly, gathering years in their brief compass, were destined to perish in their youth, long before the span of life allotted to humanity should have been exhausted. The death of Mirabeau, who alone opposed the tide of democracy and the imprudent flight of the king to Varennes, increased the republican feelings of Madame Roland. She lost all faith in the sincerity of Louis XVI. "How could it be believed," she impatiently asked, "that a king who had fled from the constitution before it was completed, would be faithful

to it when it was so evidently distasteful to him? Why capture him? why bring him back from Varennes? Let the perjured monarch fly, and the republic be proclaimed at once." How much misery, blood, and shame might have been spared to France if Louis XVI., instead of being brought back to degradation and death, had been allowed to proceed on his journey. The young republic, pure and free, would not then have been stained with the innocent blood of one whose only crime was that of being born an absolute king. On the evening of the day when the monarch's flight was discovered, Péthion, Buzot, Brissot, and Robespierre had met as usual at the house of Madame Roland. The three first and her husband agreed with her concerning the expediency of a republic, and considered the flight of Louis as equivalent to an abdication. Robespierre alone differed from them: it was characteristic of him that he never went further than events, though he was always ready to go as far. On this occasion he felt convinced that the royalists had prepared a general massacre of the patriots, and that he should be one of the earliest victims: a belief which gave a more livid hue than usual to his thin and greenish countenance. When Madame Roland and her friends spoke of a republic, Robespierre bit his nails, and eyeing his future victims, then his friends, asked them with a sneer what they meant by a republic.

The republic of their enthusiastic dreams was one of freedom and glory, as pure as it was ideal; time shewed what blood and tyranny it took for Robespierre to found his. In the month of September of the year 1791, Roland, whose mission was over, returned with his wife to Villefranche.

Here Madame Roland resumed her domestic duties; to all appearance as calm as ever. But there had arisen in her soul a fever which could only be quenched in her blood. All the burning enthusiasm of her youth, all the passion which slumbered in her heart, and which her marriage with Roland only repressed, broke forth with the strength of a long-hidden fire. She gave to freedom and her country that love which, in her as in all noble minds, was only a longing for ideal excellence such as no human being or earthly affection could have gratified.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME ROLAND AND THE GIRONDISTS.

In the month of December of the year 1791, Roland and his wife, unable to remain longer away from the centre of agitation, returned to Paris. The constitution had been accepted by the king. The labours of the Constituent Assembly were over, and those of the Legislative Assembly now began.

Three parties divided the new assembly: the Girondists, the Mountaineers, and the Plain. The first took their name from the department of the Gironde, whence most of them came: they were young, eloquent, and enthusiastic men; but rash, inexperienced, and deficient in firmness or stability. With far less talent, and much more violence, than the Girondists, the Mountaineers carried in their convictions an earnestness and fanaticism which could scarcely fail to insure their ultimate triumph. They were called Mountaineers, from the elevated benches on which they sat in the Assembly. The name of Plain was given to a weak and moderate party which occupied the central and lowest portion of the house.

The unhappy dissensions of the Girondists and Mountaineers, which proved the ruin of the republic, did not begin in earnest until the fall of monarchy. Previously to the 10th of August, serious differences arose between these two parties; but they were not such as to prevent them from acting together every time a new blow could be directed against royal authority. This bond of republican feeling gradually drew them around Madame Roland. Without seeking for it, she thus found herself ere long the nucleus of a large and powerful party. The singular and expressive beauty of her

face and person, which reminded some of her admirers of Rousseau's Julie, the native elegance and dignity of her manners, her harmonious voice and flowing language, and, above all, the fervour and eloquence of her patriotism, seemed to mark her out for the part which had been instinctively assigned to her. She presided over political meetings with so much tact and discretion, as to appear a calm spectator; whilst she, in reality, imparted her own fervent enthusiasm to all those who came near her. The young and handsome Barbaroux, the elegant Buzot, the licentious Louvet, Sillery, the husband of Madame de Genlis, Vergniaud, the orator, equally admired and respected her. Though possessed of more than ordinary attractions, and married to a man who might have been her father; though surrounded by men, young, handsome, and eloquent; Madame Roland, strong in her severe purity, preserved her character and reputation unsullied. Her friends spoke of her with mingled veneration; and enthusiasm. "O Roland! Roland!" exclaimed Louvet, after her untimely death, "how many virtues have they assassinated with thee! how much virtue, beauty, and genius have they not immolated, in the person of thy wife—a far greater man than thou ever wert!"

The admiration his wife excited was the cause of Roland's rise and ruin. When the Girondist ministry was formed, in March 1792, his friends had him named Minister of the Interior. Madame Roland, without allowing herself to be dazzled by her new position, quietly removed from her little apartment in the Rue de la Harpe to the splendid hotel formerly occupied by Calonne and Necker. Her political power during this her husband's first ministry was, like that she had previously exercised, great though occult. She influenced not only the acts of her husband, who reposed unbounded confidence in her, but likewise those of the entire Girondist party. She generally sat in a little drawing-room, furnished with extreme simplicity, and where Roland received his colleagues and most intimate friends. They concerted their measures in her presence, and often asked and

took her advice. Her tact and gentleness were especially displayed in moderating their discussions whenever they became too animated.

Madame Roland instinctively imparted to the Girondists that feeling of mistrust against the king, which was strengthened in her by the earnestness of her republican tendencies. She had no faith in the sincerity of Louis XVI. since the flight to Varennes, and despised his vacillating weakness. She believed the calumnious imputations cast on the morals of the queen, and hated her as the persevering enemy of freedom. If she was too severe, and often unjust, towards the sovereigns, Madame Roland did not err when she pronounced the constitution impracticable. Experience only strengthened this conviction, which the Girondists gradually learned to share. They had never been very sincere partisans of constitutional monarchy, and they now affected to consider the sovereign as a secret foe, whom it was their duty to watch and detect. Let it not be forgotten that neither Louis XVI. nor Marie Antoinette could appear to their contemporaries as they have since been seen by posterity, with a halo of misfortune to purify and exalt their characters. They were then real, unromantic, and imprudent human beings, most awkwardly and unhappily placed in the path of the revolution. Notwithstanding their prejudices, the Girondist ministers were frequently touched by the evident goodness of heart of the king; but the imprudently-avowed hatred of the queen for the constitution, and her well-known influence over her husband, steeled them against Louis XVI., even more effectually than the persevering mistrust of Madame Roland. This mistrust, caused by a jealous love of freedom, is the only stain which rests on her political career. It unfortunately happens that, in times of national strife and convulsion, few, even amongst the most noble-minded, are willing to believe in the sincerity of their opponents; they are thus led, not only into injustice, but into great political errors. The exaggerated doubts of Madame Roland, and of the Girondists, concerning the sincerity of the king, ultimately

proved as fatal to themselves as to the sovereign. In one respect, however, the penetration of Madame Roland did not deceive her: she perceived from the first the double part Dumouriez was playing, and she repeatedly warned her husband and his colleagues of that general's insincerity.

With this mistrust on one side, and a hesitation which almost warranted it on the other, the policy of the ministers and that of the king daily became more irreconcilable. The ministers exacted that he should sanction the decrees of the assembly against the emigrants and the clergy, and Louis refused to give those decrees the sanction by which they were to become law. Madame Roland, rendered impatient by this delay, and feeling anxious to screen her husband from any responsibility he might incur, advised him to write a letter to the king urging him to compliance, and to keep a copy of this letter for his personal justification. Roland consented, and, as his wife always assisted him in his literary compositions, he now requested her to undertake this which she had suggested: she complied. This famous letter was couched in the most austere language: it contained truths, but too harshly expressed to be acceptable. Had it been written to a powerful monarch, this letter would have been courageous and noble, but addressed to a weak and captive king on the brink of ruin, it was cruel and ungenerous. Her hatred for royalty, and her zeal for the republic, rendered Madame Roland unjust. The only effect which the letter she had written in her husband's name produced upon the king, was to make him persist in his conduct, and dismiss his ministry. Roland immediately read the copy of his letter to the assembly, as a justification of his conduct. The resistance of the king, and his dismissal of the popular ministers, heightened the deep feeling of irritation which already existed against Louis XVI. Roland and the other ministers were hailed as martyrs to their patriotism, and Roland's letter was ordered to be printed, and sent to the eighty-three departments.

The power of Madame Roland was not such as to vanish

with station. Her influence was never greater than in the humble apartment of the faubourg St Jacques, to which she retired on leaving the minister's splendid hotel. The Girondists, now openly aiming at a republic, gathered around her, and spoke with more freedom than they had yet displayed. Amongst those who then visited her assiduously was Barbaroux, whom a vague conjecture asserts to have been the object of that secret passion to which Madame Roland remotely alludes in a passage of her Memoirs.

Barbaroux was the handsomest of the Girondists: he came from Marseilles, where the descendants of the Grecian colonists often inherit the old classic beauty of their ancestors. Handsome as an Antinous, eloquent and patriotic, Barbaroux may have appeared to Madame Roland the realisation of her youthful dreams. Her beauty and noble character inspired him with a deep and respectful admiration. He soon discerned, that if "of all modern men Roland most resembled Cato," it was to his wife that he owed his courage and talents. They frequently conversed on the state of the country, on the perfidy of the court, and the failing cause of freedom. Once, when Roland had been expressing his mournful apprehensions, "his wife," observes Barbaroux in his Memoirs, "wept as she listened to him; I wept myself, as I looked upon her." With the promptness which characterised him, Barbaroux suggested to his friends that the south of France might be made the stronghold of freedom. As the enthusiastic young man developed his plan, and spoke of the republican tendencies of his countrymen, the austere brow of Roland gradually became more serene, whilst his beautiful wife, drying her tears, listened with hopeful joy. If any love did indeed exist between these two kindred spirits, it was such as neither would have blushed to avow.

A few days after Roland's dismissal from the ministry, the events of the 20th of June took place; the 10th of August and the fall of monarchy speedily followed. Roland and his colleagues were recalled to power: his wife re-entered the minister's hotel; the triumphant Girondists once more

gathered around her: but their day was gone, and, after sharing their errors and illusions, Madame Roland was now destined to endure their sufferings and noble martyrdom.

The events of the 10th of August could never have taken place but for the union of the Girondists and the Mountaineers. Casting aside their dissensions, the two parties united their efforts for that one day: but they renewed their quarrel on the morrow. In their impatience of once more getting into power and founding the republic, the Girondists overlooked the immense advantage they gave to a daring and unscrupulous party. When their object was gained, they wished to check the progress of the anarchy they had helped to create; but the Mountaineers had now their own ends to further, and they were prepared to make their road to popular favour through blood, were it so needed. They soon perceived how shrinkingly the Girondists held back whenever the blood of the innocent was at stake, and yet how reluctant they were to yield their popularity. The Mountaineers made a fearful use of the scruples and weakness of their antagonists; who now found themselves, like Mirabeau at the epoch of his death, in the path of the torrent they had let loose. Compelled to endure the massacres of September and the execution of Louis XVI. for the sake of their own safety, they revolted, at length, against this sanguinary tyranny, and perished for having protested against the Reign of Terror.

No sooner was monarchy overthrown than the Girondists perceived their weakness. Danton and his accomplices organised a general massacre of the royalists then imprisoned in Paris. Roland, though Minister of the Interior, only possessed a nominal power: the real authority was invested in the hands of Danton; the use he made of that authority was to deluge the prisons with blood. Never were female heroism and devotedness displayed more conspicuously than during those fearful massacres. They began on the 2d of September 1792, at the Abbaye, with the murder of thirty priests, and of the Swiss soldiers imprisoned since the 10th of August.

An usher named Maillard attempted to give some shew of legality to these hideous doings. He presided in the prison over a mock tribunal, before which the victims were summoned in rapid succession: a few were purposely acquitted. Amongst those who came to receive their sentence, was M. de Sombreuil, the obnoxious governor of the Invalides, and whose name has been immortalised by the heroic devotedness of his daughter. Her love for her father had induced her to share his captivity and dangers ever since his arrest. On the day of the massacre, she stood, from the beginning, near the tribunal, within hearing of all that passed, ready to perish with her father. He came, was heard, and condemned. The door of the court-yard where the victims met their fate opened, but Mademoiselle de Sombreuil threw herself before the old man; she clung to him with the energy of despair, and in heart-rending accents besought the blood-stained murderers to spare her father's life. Moved by her tears and passionate entreaties, they granted the request; but on a fearful condition: blood was then flowing around them like water; the blood of the aristocrats; would she prove her patriotism by drinking a glass of the still warm tide. "Give it," she energetically replied, "you will see what a daughter can do for her father;" and she drank unshrinkingly. The courage of her love awed the monsters around her: struck with admiration, they protected her against their comrades, and took her and her father home in triumph.

The youthful daughter of the author Cazotte emulated the heroism of Mademoiselle de Sombreuil, whose room she shared in the Abbaye. The enthusiastic piety of Cazotte, and his correspondence with Laporte, were the crimes for which he had been incarcerated. His daughter, of her own accord, accompanied him to prison; she knew some time beforehand of the massacres that were going to take place—for the fact was generally suspected—and endeavoured to conciliate the ferocious Marseillaise, by whom it was to be effected. Softened by her youth and beauty, they promised to spare her father's life. Notwithstanding this assurance, Mademoiselle Cazotte accompanied her father to the tribunal;

he was condemned; but when the door opened that led to the fatal court, his child, like Mademoiselle de Sombreuil, threw herself before him, and interceded for his life. The Marseillaise, faithful to their promise, saved them both from the fury of the crowd, and did not leave them until they had found a safe asylum. One of the men who had rendered themselves guilty of this act of compassion, confessed the fact, with some misgiving, to Marat on the following day. Thirsting as he did for the blood of the aristocrats, Marat could not restrain his tears as he heard of the heroic devotedness of Cazotte's daughter. "Nay," he exclaimed, "the father who had such a child deserved to live." The pure and holy love of Mademoiselle Cazotte could not, however, shield her father from further danger: a short time after the massacres of September, he was again incarcerated; his daughter was sent to a different prison, and not released until he had perished on the scaffold, lest she should soften judges as she had softened murderers.

The royalist ladies imprisoned after the 10th of August were, from the beginning of the massacre, marked out as fit victims of the popular hatred. The Princess de Tarente gloried with undaunted courage, in her friendship for the queen, defied her murderers, and roused, by her daring spirit, whatever trace of generosity still lingered in their hearts: she was dismissed unhurt. The Princess of Lamballe proved less fortunate. Her father-in-law, the Duke of Penthièvre, who loved her as his own child, spent a hundred thousand crowns in order to purchase her life from her gaolers and judges. Her known attachment to Marie Antoinette was the only crime of this beautiful and amiable woman. She was incarcerated in the prison of La Force, and for two days remained in her cell apparently forgotten by the murderers: from her room she could hear the sounds of the massacre below; rendered almost unconscious by terror, she only wakened from one fainting fit to sink into another. On the second day two National Guards entered her room, and abruptly bade her follow them to the Abbaye: she rose, hastily attired herself, and obeyed. On reaching the tribunal, and beholding the

traces of the recent massacre, she fainted away with horror. When she recovered consciousness, her judges bade her swear to love equality and freedom, and hate kings and queens. "I can take the first oath," she replied; "but hatred of the king and queen I cannot swear, for it is not in my heart." "Swear," said one of the judges, "or you perish." The princess remained silent. They then ordered her to be taken out into the street, recommending her to cry out, "Long live the nation!" as soon as she left the prison. She forgot to do so, and uttered an exclamation of horror on beholding the pavement strewn with corpses. Her pure and touching beauty interested many of those who now gazed upon her, and, anxious to save her, they exclaimed from the crowd, "Cry out, 'Long live the nation!' and nothing shall be done to thee." The princess was, unfortunately, too terrified to obey: the silence of fear was taken for the refusal of defiance: a blow was aimed at her head; her blood flowed; in an instant she was felled to the earth, and murdered, with circumstances of the most atrocious barbarity. Her head, borne on a pike, was carried all over Paris, and displayed before the windows of the royal family in the Temple. The king threw himself before Marie Antoinette, and drew her away before her look could rest on the livid features of her murdered friend.

The Princess of Lamballe was not the last victim: her death, which made the old Duke of Penthièvre die with grief, was but the prelude of deeds more hideous still, but foreign to the purport of this work.

Théroigne de Méricourt, and women of her stamp, took an active share in these massacres. The wives of the "égorgeurs" (cut-throats) regularly brought their husbands their soup, as though they were engaged in some ordinary work. Heroism, devoted love, pity, fierceness, and callous indifference, were alike displayed during those days of terror; which, whatever may be said to the contrary, were indeed "the crime of a few men, but not the crime of liberty." *

* Lamartine, Hist. des Girondins, vol. iii., p. 400.

The soul of Madame Roland was filled with horror at what she saw and heard. If anything increased her despair, it was the consciousness that her husband, though Minister of the Interior, could not prevent, could not do anything. "We are under the knife of Robespierre and Marat," she despairingly wrote to a friend, on the 5th of September; and on the 9th she added, "You know my enthusiasm for the revolution; well, I am ashamed of it now: it has been sullied by monsters; it is hideous." The proclamation of the republic, which at another time would have filled her with joy, now seemed to her prophetic soul but the forerunner of the fall of the men by whom that republic had been founded. The Girondists themselves were not unconscious of their approaching destiny. On the evening of the day on which the republic was proclaimed, they met at the house of Madame Roland. At the close of their frugal supper, Vergniaud rose, and filled his glass, in order to drink to the republic. Before he drank, Madame Roland scattered rose leaves, from her bouquet, over the wine, according to the custom of the ancients. When the beverage was quaffed, Vergniaud, setting down the glass, turned towards Barbaroux, and said, in a low voice, "Branches of the cypress-tree, Barbaroux, not roses, should have been scattered on our wine to-night: who knows, if, in drinking to a republic whose cradle is steeped in the blood of September, we be not drinking to our own deaths? Nevertheless, and if this wine were my blood, I would still quaff it to equality and freedom."

The energetic protest of Roland against the massacres drew down on him, and on his wife, who was known to have inspired it, the hatred of Marat and Danton. No consideration of policy or safety could induce Madame Roland to suffer the intimacy or protection of a man who always appeared to her stained with the blood of September. Notwithstanding Danton's attempts to effect a reconciliation, she never ceased—from September 1792 to the execution of Louis XVI. in January 1793, when Roland resigned—to urge her husband to a noble though unavailing resistance against the power of the

Mountaineers. This energetic abhorrence of crime and criminals she communicated to the whole party of the Gironde. The passion and eloquence which had hastened the progress of the revolution, were now all directed to the holy object of purifying it from the stains cast upon it by a few guilty men. And in this, her second and nobler task, she displayed still more fearlessness and independence than when she urged her friends to the overthrow of royalty. The power of Madame Roland over the Girondists at this epoch, and the apprehensions her eloquence and energy excited, are proved by the hatred which was suddenly displayed against her by the Jacobins. Marat included her in his denunciations against the Girondists, and assailed her in the coarsest terms in his *Ami du Peuple.* Matters went so far that her life and that of Roland were openly threatened. On several occasions, they were persuaded by their friends to leave the ministerial hotel, and sleep in some secure place. Madame Roland complied very reluctantly. Her heroic soul told her that if such a crime were to be committed by the anarchists, the very horror it would inspire might be useful to liberty. She justly thought that those who engage in a revolution, and who value honour and freedom, must learn to count life as nothing. Towards the close of her husband's ministry, when events became daily more critical, she absolutely refused to leave the hotel. The only precaution she adopted, was to sleep with a pistol under her pillow, in order to protect herself from the brutality of those who might attempt her life.

The quarrels of the Jacobins and the Girondists became more bitter and incessant as they drew to a close. The Girondists inexorably repulsed Danton every time he attempted a reconciliation: they would either have a pure republic, or they would perish. Urged by Madame Roland, they, moreover, resolved to attack Robespierre; whose power had rapidly increased. In a speech of memorable eloquence, Louvet unveiled the secret ambition of the revolutionary pharisee: but the attack only recoiled on its authors, and tended to strengthen the power of the future dictator. The resolve of the

Convention to accuse and judge the king might alone have warned the Girondists of their fate. A friend of Madame Roland was with her and her husband when they learned this important decision of the Convention. "The Convention both accuses and judges," exclaimed Roland; "it is dishonoured!" His wife said nothing; but when their child came in, she pressed her to her heart, and wept silently. Impatient to ruin a woman from whose talents and energy they felt they had so much to fear, the Jacobins sought to implicate Madame Roland in an imaginary royalist conspiracy, through the agency of a contemptible spy named Viard. She was summoned before the bar of the Convention, in order to justify herself from Viard's accusations. She appeared in the assembly with the easy dignity that always characterised her. On being asked her name, "My name is Roland," she replied, "a name of which I am proud; for it is that of a good and honourable man." Several other questions were addressed to her, such as, "If she knew Viard? when she had seen him? and what had passed between them?" She answered, that Viard had twice written to her to obtain an interview; that she had seen him once; and, after some conversation, having discovered him to be a spy, had dismissed him with contempt. The evident falsehood of Viard's accusation, and the simple dignity of Madame Roland's replies, told equally in her favour. Amidst the general applause of the members, the president decreed that the honours of the sitting belonged to her. The Jacobins in the galleries remained silent. Marat rose, and pointing to them, gloomily observed: "Look at that public; it is wiser than you are."

The trial of Louis XVI. betrayed the increasing weakness of the Girondists. Many of them not only sympathised with him as a man, but thought that the nation, though it might depose, could not judge its monarch. But, with this conviction, they, nevertheless, sanctioned the trial, and took part in it; lest their refusal should furnish the Jacobins with a pretence of accusing them of royalist tendencies. Two days after the king's execution, on the 23d of January 1793, Roland re-

signed his post; which had long been purely nominal. Oppressed with grief at the dangers she foresaw for the republic, Madame Roland lived in great retirement. A few of her friends still visited, however, the woman whom Marat and Camile Desmoulins attacked in their pamphlets, and whom Danton openly denounced as the Circe of the republic. The only charm she used was that of her own heroic spirit, which she sought to infuse into the men who struggled for freedom against anarchy. This struggle was drawing to a close. After several unsuccessful attempts, the Jacobins resolved to coerce the Convention into submission to their will: that will was, that the twenty-two Girondist members should be accused of treason, arrested, and condemned. For that purpose they organised an insurrection, which lasted from the 30th of May to the 2d of June. The Convention, threatened, insulted, and besieged, at length yielded to force, and passed the decree which doomed its most illustrious and eloquent members to death, and France to anarchy and terror.

The hatred of the triumphant Mountaineers did not forget either Roland or his wife. On the evening of the 31st of May, six armed men, provided with an order from the Revolutionary Committee, went to arrest the ex-minister. Roland energetically declared that nothing but force should induce him to obey the order of this illegal power. The men, not daring to enforce their mandate, left a guard upon Roland and retired for new orders. Madame Roland, though seriously ill, rose, dressed herself hastily, and immediately proceeded to the Convention, to protest against the attempted outrage. She made her way through the troops and armed men who surrounded the Tuileries, but could not succeed in gaining admittance to the hall, where the Girondists were then engaged in their death struggle.

From the place where she stood waiting, she could hear, however, the sounds of the stormy debate within. Vergniaud, on learning that she was there, came and exchanged a few words with her. She urged him to procure her admittance; she thought that an energetic and eloquent reproof might

rouse, perchance, the Convention from the stupor into which it had been thrown by the audacity of the Jacobins. Vergniaud dissuaded her from this course, of which he shewed her the perfect uselessness. She returned home to consult with Roland. He had escaped by a back-door, and she found him concealed in the house of a friend. After a short deliberation between them, it was agreed that she should return to the Convention. She did so; but when she reached the Tuileries, she found that the sitting was over: a group of canoneers, who still lingered on the Place de la Revolution, where they had come to intimidate the Convention, informed her that the Jacobins had prevailed, and that their next triumph would be the decree of accusation against the Girondists; which the assembly could not fail to pass when it met on the following day.

Madame Roland had long been aware that when her friends fell, she must fall with them. She was known to have shared their principles, and guided many of their measures; the blame of her husband's acts had been publicly thrown upon her by Danton in the hall of the Convention, and her political part had been sufficiently remarkable to make her feel that she was bound, in honour, to accept its responsibility, even though that responsibility should be death on a scaffold. It was this sense of duty that rendered her unwilling to leave Paris, as she might have done, before the 31st of May. Conscious of her own innocence, and of the purity of her motives, she disdained a flight unworthy alike of her character and of her destiny. The success of the Jacobins on the 31st of May confirmed her in this resolve. The friend at whose house Roland had taken refuge could not let her share his asylum; she seized this as a pretence, and returned home to await her fate. Overcome with fatigue she was yielding to sleep, when her servant entered her room and informed her that several armed men requested to see her. This was no more than she had expected. The promptness with which they made use of their power shewed her how deep and unrelenting was the hatred of her enemies. She rose, dressed herself carefully, and

appeared before her visitors; they shewed her a warrant for her apprehension, in which the motives of her arrest were not even set forth. She knew the document to be illegal, but perceiving the uselessness of resistance, calmly submitted. She had already provided for the safety of her daughter, and all she now asked for was leisure to make her own preparations. She did so with perfect calmness, notwithstanding the crowd of individuals of every sort who filled the apartment. At seven in the morning everything was in readiness to take her to prison, and she bade her daughter and the weeping servants a last farewell; gently exhorting them to resignation.

The men who arrested her beheld with surprise the marks of affection bestowed on a woman whom the calumnies of Marat had taught them to consider with abhorrence. A hackney-coach waited below to convey her to the Abbaye; she walked towards it between two rows of armed men, who followed the coach when she had entered it. "To the guillotine!" cried a few women in the crowd. "Shall we draw down the blinds?" asked one of the commissioners. Madame Roland calmly refused: "Innocence," she said, "has no need to put on the aspect of crime." "You have more strength of mind than most men," observed the commissioner; "and you will wait patiently for justice!" "Justice!" she passionately exclaimed; "were justice done to me, I should not be here to-day: but I shall walk as calmly to the scaffold as I now proceed to prison."

That prison was reached ere long. Was this, then, the goal of those high dreams and aspirations towards freedom which had haunted her mind even from the days of her childhood?

CHAPTER V.

CHARLOTTE CORDAY.

AMONGST the women of the French Revolution, there is one who stands essentially apart: a solitary episode of the eventful story. She appears for a moment, performs a deed,—heroic as to the intention, criminal as to the means,—and disappears for ever: lost in the shadow of time—an unfathomed mystery.

And it is, perhaps, this very mystery that has invested with so much interest the name of one known by a single deed; which, though intended by her to deliver her country, changed little in its destinies. To admire her entirely is impossible; to condemn her is equally difficult. No one can read her history without feeling that, to judge her absolutely, lies not in the province of man. Beautiful, pure, gentle, and a murderess, she attracts and repels us in almost equal degrees; like all those beings whose nature is inexplicable and strange, according to the ordinary standard of humanity. Although it is generally acknowledged that she did not exercise over contemporary events that repressing power for which she sacrificed her life, it is felt, nevertheless, that no history of the times in which she lived, is complete without her name; and to her brief and tragic history an eloquent modern historian * has devoted some of his most impressive pages. This would be a sufficient apology for introducing her here, were not, moreover, her name as closely linked with the history of the Girondists as that of Madame Roland. If one was the chief of that ill-fated party, the other undertook to be their avenger.

* Lamartine.

The 31st of May was the signal of the fall and dispersion of the Girondists. Some, like Barbaroux, Buzot, Louvet, and their friends, retired to the provinces, which they endeavoured to rouse for one last struggle. Others, like Madame Roland and the twenty-two, prepared themselves in their silent prison solitude for death and the scaffold. The name of the Girondists now became a sound as proscribed as that of royalist had been during their brief sway. No voice gifted with power was raised throughout the republic in favour of the men by whom, in the midst of such enthusiastic acclamations, that republic had been founded. France was rapidly sinking into that state of silent apathy which foreboded the Reign of Terror: discouraged by their experience of the past, men lost their faith in humanity, and selfishly despaired of the future. A maiden's heroic spirit alone conceived the daring project of saving those who had so long and so nobly striven for freedom; or, if this might not be, of avenging their fall, and striking terror into the hearts of their foes, by a deed of solemn immolation, worthy of the stern sacrifices of paganism, offered up of yore on the blood-stained shrines of the goddess Nemesis.

This maiden was Marie-Anne Charlotte of Corday and of Armont, one of the last descendants of a noble though impoverished Norman family, which counted amongst its near relatives, Fontenelle, the wit and philosopher of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and amongst its ancestors, the father of the great tragic poet of France, Pierre Corneille.

Her father, Jacques of Corday and of Armont, was a younger son of this noble line. He was, however, poorer than many of the peasants amongst whom he lived, cultivating with his own hands his narrow inheritance. He married in early life a lady of gentle blood, but as poor as himself. They had five children and a noble name to support, in a vain show of dignity, on their insufficient income. It thus happened that Charlotte, their fourth child and second daughter, was born in a thatched dwelling, in the village of Saint-Saturnin des Lignerets; and that in the register of the parish church where

she was baptized, on the 28th of July 1768, the day after her birth, she is described as "born in lawful wedlock of Jacques Francois of Corday, esquire, sieur of Armont, and of the noble dame Marie Charlotte-Jacqueline, of Gauthier des Authieux, his wife." It was under these difficult circumstances, which embittered his temper, and often caused him to inveigh in energetic terms against the injustice of the law of primogeniture, that M. d'Armont reared his family. As soon as they were of age, his sons entered the army; one of his daughters died young; and he became a widower when the other two were emerging from childhood into youth. They remained for some time with their father, but at length entered the Abbaye aux Dames, in the neighbouring town of Caen.

The greatest portion of the youth of Charlotte Corday—to give her the name by which she is generally known—was spent in the calm obscurity of her convent solitude. Many high visions, many burning dreams and lofty aspirations, already haunted her imaginative and enthusiastic mind, as she slowly paced the silent cloisters, or rested, lost in thought, beneath the shadow of the ancient elms. It is said that, like Madame Roland, she contemplated secluding herself for ever from the world in her monastic retreat; but, affected by the scepticism of the age, which penetrated even beyond convent walls, she gave up this project. From these early religious feelings, Charlotte derived, however, the calm devotedness which characterised her brief career: for though self-sacrifice may not be the exclusive attribute of Christianity, it cannot be denied that the deep humility by which it is accompanied —a feeling almost unknown to the ancients—is in itself the very spirit of Christ. The peaceful and solemn shadow of the old cloister favoured the mild seriousness of Charlotte's character. Within the precincts of her sacred retreat she grew up in grave and serene loveliness, a being fit for the gentlest duties of woman's household life, or for one of those austere and fearless deeds which lead to the scaffold and give martyrdom in a holy cause.

The scepticism that prevailed for the last few years preced-

ing the revolution was not the sensual atheism which had disgraced the eighteenth century so long. The faith in a first and eternal Cause, in the sacredness of human rights and the holiness of duty, was firmly held by many noble spirits, who hailed with enthusiasm the first dawn of democracy. This faith was blended, in the soul of Charlotte Corday, with a passionate admiration of antiquity. All the austerity and republican enthusiasm of her illustrious ancestor, Pierre Corneille, seemed to have come down to his young descendant. Even Rousseau and Raynal, the apostles of democracy, had no pages that could absorb her so deeply as those of ancient history, with its stirring deeds and immortal recollections. Often, like Manon Phlipon in the recess of her father's workshop, might Charlotte Corday be seen, in her convent cell, thoughtfully bending over an open volume of Plutarch; that powerful and eloquent historian of all heroic sacrifices.

When the Abbaye aux Dames was closed, in consequence of the revolution, Charlotte was in her twentieth year, in the prime of life and of her wonderful beauty; and never, perhaps, did a vision of more dazzling loveliness, step forth from beneath the dark convent portal into the light of the free and open world. She was rather tall, but admirably proportioned, with a figure full of native grace and dignity: her hands, arms, and shoulders, were models of pure sculptural beauty. An expression of singular gentleness and serenity characterised her fair, oval countenance and regular features. Her open forehead, dark and well-arched eyebrows, and eyes of a gray so deep that it was often mistaken for blue, added to her naturally grave and meditative appearance; her nose was straight and well-formed, her mouth serious but exquisitely beautiful. Like most of the women of the fine Norman race, she had a complexion of transparent purity; enhanced by the rich brown hair which fell in thick curls around her neck, according to the fashion of the period. A simple severity characterised her dress of sombre hue, and the low and becoming lace cap which she habitually wore is still known by her name in France. Her whole aspect was fraught with so

much modest grace and dignity, that, notwithstanding her youth, the first feeling she invariably inspired was one of respect, blended with involuntary admiration for a being of such pure and touching loveliness.

On leaving the convent in which she had been educated, Charlotte Corday went to reside with her aunt, Madame Coutellier de Bretteville Gouville; an old royalist lady, who inhabited an ancient-looking house in one of the principal streets of Caen. There the young girl, who had inherited a little property, spent several years, chiefly engaged in watching the progress of the revolution. The feelings of her father were similarly engrossed: he wrote several pamphlets in favour of the revolutionary principles; and one in which he attacked the right of primogeniture. His republican tendencies confirmed Charlotte in her opinions; but of the deep, overpowering strength which those opinions acquired in her soul, during the long hours she daily devoted to meditation, no one ever knew, until a stern and fearful deed—more stern and fearful in one so gentle—had revealed it to all France. A silent reserve characterised this epoch of Charlotte Corday's life: her enthusiasm was not external, but inward: she listened to the discussions which were carried on around her without taking a part in them herself. She seemed to feel instinctively that great thoughts are always better nursed in the heart's solitude: that they can only lose their native depth and intensity by being revealed too freely before the indifferent gaze of the world. Those with whom she then occasionally conversed took little heed of the substance of her discourse, and could remember nothing of it when she afterwards became celebrated; but all recollected well her voice, and spoke with strange enthusiasm of its pure, silvery sound. Like Madame Roland, whom she resembled in so many respects, Charlotte possessed this rare and great attraction; and there was something so touching in her youthful and almost childlike utterance of heroic thoughts, that it affected even to tears those who heard her, on her trial, calmly defending herself from the infamous accusations of her judges, and glorying,

with the same low, sweet tones, in the deadly deed which had brought her before them.

The fall of the Girondists, on the 31st of May, first suggested to Charlotte Corday the possibility of giving an active shape to her hitherto passive feelings. She watched with intense, though still silent, interest the progress of events, concealing her secret indignation and thoughts of vengeance under her habitually calm aspect. Those feelings were heightened in her soul by the presence of the fugitive Girondists, who had found a refuge in Caen, and were urging the Normans to raise an army to march on Paris. She found a pretence to call upon Barbaroux, then with his friends, at the Intendance. She came twice, accompanied by an old servant, and protected by her own modest dignity. Péthion saw her in the hall, where she was waiting for the handsome Girondist, and observed, with a smile, "So, the beautiful aristocrat is come to see republicans." "Citizen Péthion," she replied, "you now judge me without knowing me, but a time will come when you shall learn who I am." With Barbaroux, Charlotte chiefly conversed of the imprisoned Girondists; of Madame Roland and Marat. The name of this man had long haunted her with a mingled feeling of dread and horror. To Marat she ascribed the proscription of the Girondists, the woes of the republic, and on him she resolved to avenge her ill-fated country. Charlotte was not aware that Marat was but the tool of Danton and Robespierre. "If such actions could be counselled," afterwards said Barbaroux, "it is not Marat whom we would have advised her to strike."

Whilst this deadly thought was daily strengthening itself in Charlotte's mind, she received several offers of marriage. She declined them, on the plea of wishing to remain free: but strange, indeed, must have seemed to her, at that moment, those proposals of earthly love. One of those whom her beauty had enamoured, M. de Franquelin, a young volunteer in the cause of the Girondists, died of grief on learning her fate; his last request was, that her portrait, and a few letters

he had formerly received from her, might be buried with him in his grave.

For several days after her last interview with Barbaroux, Charlotte brooded silently over her great thought; often meditating on the history of Judith. Her aunt subsequently remembered that, on entering her room one morning, she found an old Bible open on her bed: the verse in which it is recorded that "the Lord had gifted Judith with a special beauty and fairness" for the deliverance of Israel was underlined with a pencil.

On another occasion Madame de Bretteville found her niece weeping alone; she inquired the cause of her tears. "They flow," replied Charlotte, "for the misfortunes of my country." Heroic and devoted as she was, she then also wept, perchance, over her own youth and beauty, so soon to be sacrificed for ever. No personal considerations altered her resolve: she procured a passport, provided herself with money, and paid a farewell visit to her father, to inform him that, considering the unsettled condition of France, she thought it best to retire to England. He approved of her intention, and bade her adieu. On returning to Caen, Charlotte told the same tale to Madame de Bretteville, left a secret provision for an old nurse, and distributed the little property she possessed amongst her friends.

It was on the morning of the 9th of July 1793, that she left the house of her aunt, without trusting herself with a last farewell. Her most earnest wish was, when her deed should have been accomplished, to perish, wholly unknown, by the hands of an infuriated multitude. The woman who could contemplate such a fate, and calmly devote herself to it, without one selfish thought of future renown, had indeed the heroic soul of a martyr.

Her journey to Paris was marked by no other event than the unwelcome attentions of some Jacobins with whom she travelled. One of them, struck by her modest and gentle beauty, made her a very serious proposal of marriage: she playfully evaded his request, but promised that he should

learn who and what she was at some future period. On entering Paris, she proceeded immediately to the Hotel de la Providence, Rue des Vieux Augustins, not far from Marat's dwelling. Here she rested for two days, before calling on her intended victim. Nothing can mark more forcibly the singular calmness of her mind: she felt no hurry to accomplish the deed for which she had journeyed so far, and over which she had meditated so deeply: her soul remained serene and undaunted to the last. The room which she occupied, and which has often been pointed out to inquiring strangers, was a dark and wretched attic, into which light scarcely ever penetrated. There she read again the volume of Plutarch she had brought with her,—unwilling to part from her favourite author, even in her last hours,—and probably composed that energetic address to the people which was found upon her after her apprehension. One of the first acts of Charlotte was to call on the Girondist, Duperret, for whom she was provided with a letter from Barbaroux, relative to the supposed business she had in Paris; her real motive was to learn how she could see Marat. She had first intended to strike him in the Champ de Mars, on the 14th of July, the anniversary of the fall of the Bastile, when a great and imposing ceremony was to take place. The festival being delayed, she resolved to seek him in the Convention, and immolate him on the very summit of the mountain; but Marat was too ill to attend the meetings of the National Assembly: this Charlotte learned from Duperret. She resolved, nevertheless, to go to the Convention, in order to fortify herself in her resolve. Mingling with the horde of Jacobins who crowded the galleries, she watched with deep attention the scene below. Saint Just was then urging the Convention to proscribe Lanjuinais, the heroic defender of the Girondists. A young foreigner, a friend of Lanjuinais, and who stood at a short distance from Charlotte, noticed the expression of stern indignation which gathered over her features; until, like one overpowered by her feelings and apprehensive of displaying them too openly, she abruptly left the place. Struck with her whole appear-

ance, he followed her out; a sudden shower of rain, which compelled them to seek shelter under the same archway, afforded him an opportunity of entering into conversation with her. When she learned that he was a friend of Lanjuinais, she waived her reserve, and questioned him with much interest concerning Madame Roland and the Girondists. She also asked him about Marat, with whom she said she had business. "Marat is ill; it would be better for you to apply to the public accuser, Fouquier Tinville," said the stranger. "I do not want him now, but I may have to deal with him yet," she significantly replied.

Perceiving that the rain did not cease, she requested her companion to procure her a conveyance; he complied; and, before parting from her, begged to be favoured with her name. She refused; adding, however, "You will know it before long." With Italian courtesy, he kissed her hand as he assisted her into the fiacre. She smiled, and bade him farewell.

Charlotte perceived that to call on Marat was the only means by which she might accomplish her purpose. She did so on the morning of the 13th of July, having first purchased a knife in the Palais Royal, and written him a note, in which she requested an interview. She was refused admittance. She then wrote him a second note, more pressing than the first, and in which she represented herself as persecuted for the cause of freedom. Without waiting to see what effect this note might produce, she called again at half-past seven the same evening.

Marat then resided in the Rue des Cordeliers, in a gloomy-looking house, which has since been demolished. His constant fears of assassination were shared by those around him; the porter, seeing a strange woman pass by his lodge without pausing to make any inquiry, ran out and called her back. She did not heed his remonstrance, but swiftly ascended the old stone staircase, until she had reached the door of Marat's apartment. It was cautiously opened by Albertine, a woman with whom Marat cohabited, and who passed for his wife.

Recognising the same young and handsome girl who had already called on her husband, and animated, perhaps, by a feeling of jealous mistrust, Albertine refused to admit her; Charlotte insisted with great earnestness. The sound of their altercation reached Marat; he immediately ordered his wife to admit the stranger, whom he recognised as the author of the two letters he had received in the course of the day. Albertine obeyed reluctantly; she allowed Charlotte to enter; and, after crossing with her an antechamber, where she had been occupied with a man named Laurent Basse in folding some numbers of the *Ami du Peuple*, she ushered her through two other rooms, until they came to a narrow closet where Marat was then in a bath. He gave a look at Charlotte, and ordered his wife to leave them alone: she complied, but allowed the door of the closet to remain half open, and kept within call.

According to his usual custom, Marat wore a soiled handkerchief bound round his head, increasing his natural hideousness. A coarse covering was thrown across the bath; a board, likewise placed transversely, supported his papers. Laying down his pen, he asked Charlotte the purport of her visit. The closet was so narrow that she touched the bath near which she stood. She gazed on him with ill-disguised horror and disgust, but answered, as composedly as she could, that she had come from Caen, in order to give him correct intelligence concerning the proceedings of the Girondists there. He listened, questioned her eagerly, wrote down the names of the Girondists, then added, with a smile of triumph, "Before a week, they shall have perished on the guillotine." "These words," afterwards said Charlotte, "sealed his fate." Drawing from beneath the handkerchief which covered her bosom the knife she had kept there all along, she plunged it to the hilt in Marat's heart. He gave one loud expiring cry for help, and sank back dead in the bath. By an instinctive impulse, Charlotte had instantly drawn out the knife from the breast of her victim, but she did not strike again; casting it down at his feet, she left the closet, and sat down

in the neighbouring room, thoughtfully passing her hand across her brow: her task was done.

The wife of Marat had rushed to his aid on hearing his cry for help. Laurent Basse, seeing that all was over, turned round towards Charlotte, and, with a blow of a chair, felled her to the floor; whilst the infuriated Albertine trampled her under her feet. The tumult aroused the other tenants of the house; the alarm spread, and a crowd gathered in the apartment, who learned with stupor that Marat, the Friend of the People, had been murdered. Deeper still was their wonder when they gazed on the murderess. She stood there before them with still-disordered garments, and her dishevelled hair, loosely bound by a broad green ribbon falling around her; but so calm, so serenely lovely, that those who most abhorred her crime gazed on her with involuntary admiration. "Was she, then, so beautiful?" was the question addressed, many years afterwards, to an old man, one of the few remaining witnesses of this scene. "Beautiful!" he echoed, enthusiastically; adding, with the eternal regrets of old age: "Ay, there is none such now!"

The commissary of police began her interrogatory in the saloon of Marat's apartment. She told him her name, how long she had been in Paris, confessed her crime, and recognised the knife with which it had been perpetrated. The sheath was found in her pocket, with a thimble, some thread, money, and her watch.

"What was your motive in assassinating Marat?" asked the commissary.

"To prevent a civil war," she answered.

"Who are your accomplices?"

"I have none."

She was ordered to be transferred to the Abbaye, the nearest prison. An immense and infuriated crowd had gathered around the door of Marat's house; one of the witnesses perceived that she would have liked to be delivered to this maddened multitude, and thus perish at once. She was not saved from their hands without difficulty; her courage failed her at

the sight of the peril she ran, and she fainted away on being conveyed to the fiacre. On reaching the Abbaye, she was questioned until midnight by Chabot and Drouet, two Jacobin members of the Convention. She answered their interrogatories with singular firmness; observing, in conclusion: "I have done my task, let others do theirs." Chabot threatened her with the scaffold; she answered him with a smile of disdain. Her behaviour until the 17th, the day of her trial, was marked by the same firmness. She wrote to Barbaroux a charming letter, full of graceful wit and heroic feeling. Her playfulness never degenerated into levity: like that of the illustrious Thomas More, it was the serenity of a mind that death had no power to daunt. Speaking of her action, she observed, "I considered that so many brave men need not come to Paris for the head of one man. He deserved not so much honour: the hand of a woman was enough. . . . . I have never hated but one being, and him with what intensity I have sufficiently shewn; but there are a thousand whom I love still more than I hated him. . . . . I confess that I employed a perfidious artifice in order that he might receive me. In leaving Caen, I thought to sacrifice him on the pinnacle of 'the mountain,' but he no longer went to it. In Paris they cannot understand how a useless woman, whose longest life could have been of no good, could sacrifice herself to save her country. . . . . May peace be as soon established as I desire! A great criminal has been laid low . . . . the happiness of my country makes mine. . . . . A lively imagination and a feeling heart promise but a stormy life; I beseech those who might regret me to consider this: they will then rejoice at my fate." A tenderer tone marks the brief letter she addressed to her father on the eve of her trial and death: "Forgive me, my dear father," she observed, "for having disposed of my existence without your permission. I have avenged many innocent victims. I have warded away many disasters. The people, undeceived, will one day rejoice at being delivered from a tyrant. If I endeavoured to persuade you that I was going to England, it was because I hoped

to remain unknown: I recognised that this was impossible. I hope you will not be subjected to annoyance: you have at least defenders at Caen; I have chosen Gustave Doulcet de Pontécoulant for mine: it is a mere matter of form. Such a deed allows of no defence. Farewell, my dear father. I beseech of you to forget me; or, rather, to rejoice at my fate. I die for a good cause. I embrace my sister, whom I love with my whole heart. Do not forget the line of Corneille—

'Le crime fait la honte, et non pas l'échafaud.'

To-morrow at eight I am to be tried."

On the morning of the 17th, she was led before her judges. She was dressed with care, and had never looked more lovely. Her bearing was so imposing and dignified, that the spectators and the judges seemed to stand arraigned before her. She interrupted the first witness, by declaring that it was she who had killed Marat. "Who inspired you with so much hatred against him?" asked the President.

"I needed not the hatred of others, I had enough of my own," she energetically replied; "besides, we do not execute well that which we have not ourselves conceived."

"What, then, did you hate in Marat?"

"His crimes."

"Do you think that you have assassinated all the Marats?"

"No; but now that he is dead, the rest may fear."

She answered other questions with equal firmness and laconism. Her project, she declared, had been formed since the 31st of May. "She had killed one man to save a hundred thousand. She was a republican long before the revolution, and had never failed in energy."

"What do you understand by energy?" asked the President.

"That feeling," she replied, "which induces us to cast aside selfish considerations, and sacrifice ourselves for our country."

Fouquier Tinville here observed, alluding to the sure blow she had given, that she must be well practised in crime. "The monster takes me for an assassin!" she exclaimed, in a

tone thrilling with indignation. This closed the debates, and her defender rose. It was not Doulcet de Pontécoulant—who had not received her letter—but Chauveau de la Garde, chosen by the President. Charlotte gave him an anxious look, as though she feared he might seek to save her at the expense of honour. He spoke, and she perceived that her apprehensions were unfounded. Without excusing her crime or attributing it to insanity, he pleaded for the fervour of her conviction; which he had the courage to call sublime. The appeal proved unavailing. Charlotte Corday was condemned. Without deigning to answer the President, who asked her if she had aught to object to the penalty of death being carried out against her, she rose, and walking up to her defender, thanked him gracefully. "These gentlemen," said she, pointing to the judges, "have just informed me that the whole of my property is confiscated. I owe something in the prison: as a proof of my friendship and esteem, I request you to pay this little debt."

On returning to the conciergerie, she found an artist, named Hauër, waiting for her, to finish her portrait, which he had begun at the tribunal. They conversed freely together, until the executioner, carrying the red chemise destined for assassins, and the scissors with which he was to cut her hair off, made his appearance. "What, so soon!" exclaimed Charlotte Corday, slightly turning pale; but rallying her courage, she resumed her composure, and presented a lock of her hair to M. Hauër, as the only reward in her power to offer. A priest came to offer her his ministry. She thanked him and the persons by whom he had been sent, but declined his spiritual aid. The executioner cut her hair, bound her hands, and threw the red chemise over her. M. Hauër was struck with the almost unearthly loveliness which the crimson hue of this garment imparted to the ill-fated maiden. "This toilet of death, though performed by rude hands, leads to immortality," said Charlotte with a smile.

A heavy storm broke forth as the car of the condemned left the conciergerie for the Place de la Revolution. An immense crowd lined every street through which Charlotte Corday

passed. Hootings and execrations at first rose on her path; but as her pure and serene beauty dawned on the multitude, as the exquisite loveliness of her countenance and the sculptural beauty of her figure became more fully revealed, pity and admiration superseded every other feeling. Her bearing was so admirably calm and dignified, as to rouse sympathy in the breasts of those who detested not only her crime, but the cause for which it had been committed. Many men of every party took off their hats and bowed as the cart passed before them. Amongst those who waited its approach, was a young German, named Adam Luz, who stood at the entrance of the Rue Saint Honoré, and followed Charlotte to the scaffold. He gazed on the lovely and heroic maiden with all the enthusiasm of his imaginative race. A love, unexampled perhaps in the history of the human heart, took possession of his soul. Not one wandering look of "those beautiful eyes, which revealed a soul as intrepid as it was tender," escaped him. Every earthly grace so soon to perish in death, every trace of the lofty and immortal spirit, filled him with bitter and intoxicating emotions unknown till then. "To die for her; to be struck by the same hand; to feel in death the same cold axe which had severed the angelic head of Charlotte; to be united to her in heroism, freedom, love, and death, was now the only hope and desire of his heart."

Unconscious of the passionate love she had awakened, Charlotte now stood near the guillotine. She turned pale on first beholding it, but soon resumed her serenity. A deep blush suffused her face when the executioner removed the handkerchief that covered her neck and shoulders, but she calmly laid her head upon the block. The executioner touched a spring, and the axe came down. One of Sanson's assistants immediately stepped forward, and holding up the lifeless head to the gaze of the crowd, struck it on either cheek. The brutal act only excited a feeling of horror; and it is said that—as though even in death her indignant spirit protested against this outrage—an angry and crimson flush passed over the features of Charlotte Corday.

A few days after her execution, Adam Luz published a pamphlet, in which he enthusiastically praised her deed, and proposed that a statue, with the inscription, "GREATER THAN BRUTUS," should be erected to her memory on the spot where she had perished. He was arrested and thrown into prison. On entering the Abbaye, he passionately exclaimed: "I am going to die for her!" His wish was fulfilled ere long.

Strange feverish times were those which could rouse a gentle and lovely maiden to avenge freedom by such a deadly deed; which could waken in a human heart a love whose thoughts were not of life or earthly bliss, but of the grave and the scaffold. Let the times, then, explain those natures, where so much evil and heroism are blended that man cannot mark the limits between both. Whatever judgment may be passed upon her, the character of Charlotte Corday was certainly not cast in an ordinary mould. It is a striking and noble trait, that to the last she did not repent: never was error more sincere. If she could have repented, she would never have become guilty.

Her deed created an extraordinary impression throughout France. On hearing of it, a beautiful royalist lady fell down on her knees and invoked "Saint Charlotte Corday." The republican Madame Roland calls her a heroine worthy of a better age. The poet, André Chénier—who, before a year had elapsed, followed her on the scaffold—sang her heroism in a soul-stirring strain.

The political influence of that deed may be estimated by the exclamation of Vergniaud: "She kills us, but she teaches us how to die!" It was so. The assassination of Marat exasperated all his fanatic partisans against the Girondists. Almost divine honours were paid to his memory; forms of prayer were addressed to him; altars were erected to his honour, and numberless victims sent to the scaffold as a peace-offering to his manes. On the wreck of his popularity rose the far more dangerous power of Robespierre: a new impulse was given to the Reign of Terror. Such was the "peace" which the erring and heroic Charlotte Corday won for France.

CHAPTER VI.

MARIE ANTOINETTE'S CAPTIVITY, TRIAL, AND DEATH.

MARIE ANTOINETTE had been incarcerated ten months, when Madame Roland was thrown into prison. The queen and the republican inspirer of the Gironde had met a like fate. The scaffold, which awaited them both, was to complete the resemblance between their destinies.

Well known as are the details of the captivity of the royal family in the Temple, they cannot be omitted here. We have seen the queen in her prosperity, it is fitting to behold her in misfortune. In reading once more that sad history, it will perhaps be found easier to understand how, notwithstanding her errors, Marie Antoinette has left a name to which, through all the changes of political creeds, pity and admiration will ever cling.

The Temple, to which the royal family were transferred after the 10th of August, was an old, gloomy building, erected and inhabited by the Knights-Templar of the Middle Ages. It stood in a walled enclosure, of which the gates were shut every night. Debtors found a safe refuge in this place, which their creditors had no power to invade; but their presence, and the narrow streets and low dwellings in which they lived, rendered this little neighbourhood very mean and unhealthy. "The tower," observes Cléry, in his narrative, "is about a hundred and fifty feet high, and consists of four stories; to this place it was that Louis and his unfortunate family were removed. The Bastile presented nothing of equal horror: around the foot of the tower was dug a wide deep ditch, and the part of the garden reserved for the walk of the august prisoners was enclosed by an immensely high wall; the doors,

which were made of iron, were so low and so narrow, that it was necessary to bend double and move sideways to pass the threshold; scarcely any light was suffered to enter through the windows, from the slanting screens which were placed over them, and the thick iron bars with which they were secured."

Louis XVI. accepted this sudden change of fortune with his usual resignation; his pious sister, as a trial sent by Heaven; Marie Antoinette, with subdued and silent indignation. The first few days of their captivity were not, however, the most painful the royal prisoners had to pass. Hope had not deserted them yet: the success of the foreign armies would have delivered them. In that success they believed, not without some show of reason; for the untaught bravery of French plebeians had not yet been tested on the field of battle. The first deep grief of Marie Antoinette was her separation from the Princess of Lamballe; who was torn from her arms at dead of night, and transferred to La Force, in order to be murdered a few days later by the Septembriseurs. The proclamation of the republic on the 21st of September shewed the king and his family that, from France at least, they had no more to hope: their part was over there for ever. The Princess of Lamballe, and the few devoted attendants who had followed the royal family to the Temple, were replaced by a rude man named Tison and his wife. This woman, whose mind was in an unsettled state, treated the prisoners with alternate harshness and pity: she sometimes professed herself devoted to the queen, and offered to serve her; until, alarmed for her own safety, she suddenly betrayed and accused her. Simon, a shoemaker, and Roucher, a saddler, shared the office of gaoler, and took a cruel and cowardly pleasure in tormenting their captives. They menaced and insulted the king, addressed the princesses with familiarity and arrogance, compelled them to listen to their disgusting and threatening language, and repeatedly tortured them by throwing out intimations that Louis XVI. should ere long be separated from them, in order that they might behold their tears, and receive their entreaties.

These menaces were once carried into execution. The king was abruptly separated from his family; but the despair of the queen was so overwhelming and so deep, her threats of allowing herself to die of hunger, if this barbarous separation were persisted in, so vehement, as to soften even Simon, and make him shed tears. Notwithstanding the order of the Commune to the contrary, he assumed the responsibility of allowing Louis XVI. to take his meals with his family: this favour was, fortunately, not revoked. Another indulgence, almost as great, was that the faithful Cléry was allowed to remain with the king: he proved both a servant and a friend. The life of the royal family had all the monotony without the seclusion of captivity. Watched on every side, they could scarcely hold any real communication with one another. The king rose early, and prayed and read until nine, at which time he met his family at breakfast. When this meal was over, Cléry combed out the hair of the princesses, whilst Louis instructed his son, chiefly in geography. At twelve, the whole family went down to the dreary garden which lay at the foot of their prison. They were followed, even there, by insults; which changed these hours of freedom into hours of punishment. The distant windows which overlooked the temple were, however, often thronged with sympathising friends, whose looks and gestures of pity and love cheered the royal captives. At two, they went up to dinner; this meal was embittered by the presence of their gaolers, who checked everything like freedom and confidence. Notwithstanding the severity with which they were watched, the prisoners, however, found means to hold some intercourse with their friends, and even to learn the news. Paid news-venders passed under the windows of the Temple, and, whilst appearing to hawk their papers, contrived to let the king know their contents. The princesses worked and read during the afternoon. "In the evening," relates Cléry, "the family sat round a table, whilst the queen read to them from books of history, or other instructive works. Often, and unexpectedly, she met with narratives of events that bore too great a resemblance to their

fate. These would give birth to the most melancholy reflections: Madame Elizabeth was then obliged to take up the book. The reading generally continued until eight, when I gave the dauphin his supper: the queen always heard him say his prayers."

The gaolers manifested more severity towards their prisoners as the days of their captivity increased. The princesses were compelled to mend their own clothes, those of the king and of the children, to sweep the floors of their prison, and perform many menial offices. But it was chiefly the ceaseless insults and annoyances to which they were subjected that embittered their lot. These outrages were, however, seldom directed to the queen. Her imposing dignity awed even Roucher and Simon, if not into respect, at least into silence. Their gross provocations were addressed to the king and his gentle sister, who endured everything with heroic patience. Calmly resigned to her fate, Madame Elizabeth might often be seen kneeling in prayer at the foot of her bed. She would remain there for hours in the same attitude, serene and beautiful, like a being of another and a better world.

This pious resignation formed no part of the character of Marie Antoinette: in her it would have been unnatural. She could not and would not forget that she had been a queen; that she was now a captive; that the fate of Charles I. awaited her husband: what fait awaited her, her children and the devoted sister who shared their prison, she knew not. In this agony she was sustained by pride; for the love she bore to those around her could only bow her down with despair and grief: it was for them that she suffered, and over their destiny that she wept and brooded during the live-long nights of her captivity: nights seldom refreshed by sleep. Love had no power to soothe the sorrows it had caused, but pride could enable her to bear them, if not with passive patience, at least with dignity. Such pride was not all to be condemned; for what was it but the last protest of a heroic soul against fate and man's injustice?

The fascination which Marie Antoinette had so long exercised on all those who approached her, did not vanish with rank and power. Her fading loveliness, faded by grief more than by years, had an eloquence beyond the freshness of youthful beauty. An injured queen, and a suffering wife and mother, commanded both respect and sympathy. She inspired still deeper feelings in two men named Toulan and Lepitre. They devoted themselves to her cause, planned escapes for the royal family, favoured their correspondences with their friends, and did all that the most passionate enthusiasm could inspire. This lasted for a considerable length of time, but the wife of Tison at length betrayed them, and Toulan was taken and executed. Oppressed with remorse, the wretched woman fell dangerously ill. The queen and Madame Elizabeth, touched at the excess of her grief, not only forgave her, but attended her during her illness. The hopes which the devotedness of Toulan—and his was not a solitary instance—had inspired for a moment, vanished in the heart of Marie Antoinette, as the trial of her husband came on. One thought alone now absorbed, haunted her mind. The serene resignation of the king, which compelled her to subdue the expression of her grief, added to its bitterness. Of a passionate and vehement nature, she was not made for an ever-silent agony. She sought not, like her husband, to check her sorrow: she only had power over its external tokens, and this inward and ceaseless struggle added to the fever which consumed her existence.

As long as the trial lasted, the royal family were forbidden to see the king; they would have learned none of the details of the trial itself but for the zeal and ingenious stratagems of Cléry: through his means they were even able to correspond with Louis XVI. With more grief than surprise they learned that he was condemned; and now their last despairing thought was, "should they see him once more?" They were not refused this final consolation. At half-past eight on the evening of the 20th January 1793, the king once more beheld his family. As the door of his apartment opened, the queen

and her son entered first, Madame Elizabeth and the young princess followed. They all four alternately clasped him in their arms with convulsive sobs and bursts of grief, which lasted for more than half an hour. The king at length sat down; the queen placed herself on his left, Madame Elizabeth on his right, and his children before him and between his knees. Although the room in which they sat had a glass door, through which commissaries could behold all that passed, they could not hear what the king said. He spoke purposely in a low tone, but the horrified gestures of Marie Antoinette shewed that the whole of the truth had not until then been revealed to her. The bearing of Louis XVI. was admirably calm, tender, and subdued, during the whole of this trying scene. An hour and three quarters had thus elapsed, when the king rose to part from his family. He slowly advanced with them towards the door. The queen and the dauphin were on his right. Madame Elizabeth leaned on her brother's left shoulder, Madame Royale held her father, clasped around the waist; they spoke not, but the whole room was filled with the sound of their tears and lamentations. "I assure you," said Louis, "that I will see you again at eight to-morrow morning." "You promise it?" they all exclaimed. "Yes, I promise," he replied. "Why not at seven?" asked the queen. "Let it be at seven, then," said her husband; "farewell!" he then added, in a tone so solemn and so deep, that his daughter, as if with a consciousness of the truth, fainted away at his feet. With one more embrace, the king tore himself from them.

The agony of that night was softened to Marie Antoinette by the thought that she should see her husband again on the morrow; but seven and eight o'clock struck, and she received no summons to meet the king: it was Louis himself that had declined the interview, lest it should prove too trying for those he loved. The whole of that dreadful day was spent by Marie Antoinette in long fainting fits, only interrupted by bursts of agonising grief. Time, which subdued the expression of her sorrow, could not change its nature. A sort of

despairing resignation took possession of her soul: she had ceased to hope, and she now felt like one for whom the struggle of life was henceforth over. Although the gaolers informed her that she could resume the walks in the garden, which had for some time been interdicted, she refused to do so. The mere thought of passing before the door of the king's apartment filled her with horror. Lest, however, the health of her children should suffer from this confinement, she consented, after several weeks' seclusion, to walk with them on the platform of the tower. It was immediately surrounded with high boards, in order that no friendly look might reach the queen even there.

The comparative leniency with which the royal family had been treated after the death of the king, ceased abruptly on the fall of the Girondists. It was then decided that the queen should be tried, and that the dauphin should previously be taken from her. The officers of the Convention who came to execute this barbarous order met with unexpected resistance. Casting away every feeling of queenly dignity or silent pride, the mother placed herself before the bed of her son, and vehemently declared that, though they might kill her, they should not touch her child. For two hours she defended him against all their efforts. They at length threatened to kill him in her arms if she resisted any longer. Upon this she embraced him, dressed him, and weepingly delivered him up. The unhappy and innocent child was handed over to the shoemaker, Simon: his mother never saw him again. Through the slits of the boards which surrounded the platform of her tower, she sometimes, after hours of watching, caught distant glimpses of him on the platform of the tower where he was confined, but that was all.

Although she did not know every detail of the tortures Simon inflicted on the young prince, the queen knew enough to render her life inexpressibly bitter. But her sufferings were drawing to a close. At two in the morning on the 2d of August, Marie Antoinette was abruptly wakened by the entrance into her apartment of two municipal officers, who

read her the decree of the Convention, authorising them to convey her to the Conciergerie, where she was to await her trial. She heard them without either sorrow or surprise; Madame Elizabeth and the young princess vainly entreated to be allowed to accompany the queen: their prayers and tears remained unheeded. Marie Antoinette was compelled to rise and dress before these men: they even searched her, taking away all the little jewels and trifling articles still in her possession. They only left her a pocket-handkerchief and a vinaigrette, in case she should faint whilst in their custody. It was with difficulty that she persuaded them to let her take a change of linen. When her preparations were over, she turned towards her sister and her child, embraced them tenderly, and bade them farewell. She recommended her daughter to the care of Madame Elizabeth, and requested Madame Royale to obey her aunt as if she were her mother. Not daring to trust herself with another look she then hastened down stairs; so rapidly that she forgot to stoop in passing beneath the low door, and struck her head with some force against it. One of the municipal officers asked if she had hurt herself. "Oh, no!" she mournfully replied, "nothing can hurt me now."

She entered the hackney-coach which waited for her in the yard, carrying under her arm the little bundle of things she had been allowed to take. The cell of the Conciergerie into which the queen was thrown on her arrival was the worst in the prison. General Custine, who preceded her to the scaffold, had been removed from it in order that it might be given to her: it was several steps lower than the yard, from which it received air and light, through a narrow grated window; a miserable bed, a deal table, a wooden box, and two straw-bottomed chairs, were all the furniture it contained. The damp stone walls, and the close atmosphere of this gloomy abode, made it resemble a cellar more than a place destined to receive any human being. Yet this was to be the last dwelling of a woman and a queen! This room was entered through an antechamber, in which two gendarmes with naked swords were placed; their orders were to keep the door which led

from one room into the other always open, and not to lose sight of Marie Antoinette even in her sleep. The gaolers of the Conciergerie, Richard and his wife,—notwithstanding the strictness of their orders,—treated the illustrious captive with much kindness. Instead of the coarse prison fare, Madame Richard gave the queen wholesome and delicate food prepared by herself; she introduced a little comfort into her cell, and, diverting the attention of the gendarmes by ingenious stratagems, secretly gave her news of Madame Elizabeth and her children. This worthy woman carried her devotedness so far as to seek to favour the queen's escape. She introduced, for this purpose, Michonis and the Chevalier de Rougeville into her prison. The chevalier gave Marie Antoinette a flower which contained a note offering her men and money; she was unfortunately surprised in the act of reading it. The two devoted men and Richard and his wife were immediately arrested and thrown into prison: with them vanished the queen's last hope of safety.

The dangerous office of softening the captivity of the queen was, nevertheless, eagerly sought by M. and Madame Bault, formerly gaolers of La Force. They rivalled the devotedness of Richard, whom they succeeded in the post of gaolers of the Conciergerie: although her orders were to give her prisoner only bread and water, Madame Bault, following the example of her predecessor, carefully prepared her food. Marie Antoinette never drank wine, but the Seine water did not agree with her; Madame Bault, accordingly, procured her the pure water of Arcueuil, which had been her favourite beverage in Trianon. Many persons from without, who were allowed to visit their imprisoned relatives, took this opportunity of forwarding little delicacies to the fallen queen; the women of the Halle, who had formerly been the purveyors of the royal family, privately sent her presents of their fruits and flowers. It was not without much peril to herself that Madame Bault procured her prisoner these indulgences: her husband was once severely reprimanded for having hung the damp walls of Marie Antoinette's dungeon with an old piece of tapestry; his daughter

was, however, allowed to help the prisoner to make her bed, and clear up her room; she also combed the captive's hair every morning, and mended the scanty supply of linen, and the two old gowns, to which the wardrobe of the queen of France was now reduced.

The two months which elapsed from the 2d of August to the 14th of October, when she appeared before the Revolutionary Tribunal, were spent by Marie Antoinette in passive endurance. Gifted with a mind of great energy, with more than common pride, and with the keenest susceptibilities to wrong and insult, how intense must have been the past sufferings which could reduce her passionate and impulsive nature to a state of comparative apathy. The gendarmes who watched her often saw her weeping, as she knelt in prayer at the foot of the bed; oftener still she sat listlessly near the high window, from which a faint ray of light came down on her pale face and emaciated figure: the mourning she wore made her look more wan and desolate still. But, though broken-hearted, the queen was not subdued; and this it is that justifies her pride and ennobles it into something sublime: for hers was not the pride to which rank, power, or circumstance gave birth, and which falls with them. Marie Antoinette valued these things whilst they were hers, but they formed no part of her nature: they left her, but she was herself still: she was the queen even in her dungeon; more truly royal within those gloomy walls than when surrounded by the splendours of Versailles.

On the 14th of October, Marie Antoinette was summoned before the tribunal, held in the adjoining Palais de Justice. She was meanly clad, but with evident attention to neatness and decency; her bearing was calm and dignified: she heard with indifference the long act of accusation read by Fouquier Tinville, who asserted that the crimes attributed to Messalina, Brunehault, Fredegonde, and Catherine of Medici, were far surpassed by those committed by the widow Capet. She was charged with having dilapidated the finances, with plotting against the nation, with having caused a famine, and various other political offences. Her replies were laconic and composed. Submit-

ting to events she could not control, she entered into no useless and indignant protest against the past; she also avoided compromising her own life and the safety of her friends by any imprudent defiance: to bear patiently had become her lot. One of her motives for taking this line of conduct was that such had been the course adopted by Louis XVI. Jealous of his honour, she did not wish to be contrasted with him to his disadvantage. The most infamous accusation against her was that of Hébert; who asserted that she had depraved her own child, the dauphin. Marie Antoinette disdained to make any answer. One of the jury having pressed her to reply, she turned towards the crowd, her countenance lit up by scorn and indignant majesty, merely saying, "I appeal to all the mothers present." The mothers who heard her then were the furious Tricotteuses, who daily accompanied victims to the scaffold; but even they had not so far given up all the feelings of womanhood as to remain insensible to such an appeal, and a murmur of horror and indignation against Hébert ran throughout the court. When all the accusations against her had been heard, Marie Antoinette was asked if she had anything to say: she answered, "I was a queen, and you took away my crown; a wife, and you killed my husband; a mother, and you deprived me of my children; my blood alone remains: take it, but do not make me suffer long." Chauveau de la Garde and Tronson du Coudray, her defenders, were then heard; but their noble and courageous efforts remained unavailing.

At four o'clock, on the morning of the 16th, she was condemned to die. She heard her sentence with that admirable dignity and self-possession which had never deserted her since the beginning of her trial on the 14th; although, with a barbarity worthy of them, her judges had refused to let her retire, even for one moment's rest, and scarcely allowed her any food, in the hope of subduing her courage with her physical strength. Once, feeling very thirsty, she asked for some water; no one dared to bring her any, until she repeated her request, when an officer of the gendarmes, unable to resist the impulse, brought her a glass: he lost his post for this simple act of humanity.

When the President of the Tribunal asked her if she had any objection to make to her sentence, the queen rose, disdaining to reply. The fierce applause which followed her out of the court could not disturb her proud composure. She retired to the Conciergerie, and, having obtained writing materials, addressed to Madame Elizabeth a last letter—which never reached her. In this letter she recommended her orphan children to her sister's care, fervently blessing them and her; protesting that she died in the faith of her fathers, and freely forgiving her enemies. She then threw herself on her bed, and slept for two hours. A constitutional priest was sent to her, but she declined his ministry.

"Your death," he began, "is going to expiate"—

"Faults, not crimes," she interrupted.

Two other constitutional priests who attended her proved equally unsuccessful. She refused to hear them, and prayed alone. After resting sufficiently, the queen rose, cut her hair, and dressed herself carefully. At eleven the executioner came, bound her hands, and led her to the cart. She submitted silently, heedless of all that passed around her, and of the representations of the priest at her side.

It is said, and on good authority,*—though the fact has not, we believe, been alluded to by any historian—that the men who had not thought the accusations of Hébert too infamous for the queen, conceived the project of degrading her death, by causing her to be judged and to perish between two courtesans confined in the same prison with her. They boasted of their plan until it came to the knowledge of the women concerned in it; who, degraded as they were, felt and resented the intended infamy: they both declared, with the greatest energy, that if the project were carried into effect, they would, even on the scaffold and in the face of the people, fall down at the feet of the queen, and publicly implore her forgiveness for being compelled to die with her. Alarmed at the effect such a scene might produce, the projectors of this infamous plan abandoned it reluctantly.

* Lemontey: Œuvres, vol. i. p. 280.

It was little more than eleven when the cart which contained the queen left the Conciergerie, yet she did not reach the Place de la Revolution until half-past twelve. During all that time she was subjected to the continued hootings and insults of the populace. Her firmness never forsook her; but the crimson flushes and the deadly paleness which rapidly succeeded each other on her cheeks, revealed the intense agony she endured. The cart was compelled to stop opposite the church of St Roch, in order that the dense crowd assembled on the steps might obtain a better view of their victim. Overcome by her feelings, the queen bowed down her head for a moment. It was observed that, as she passed along the Rue St Honoré, she looked at the republican inscriptions and tricolor flags of the houses with evident curiosity: another interpretation placed on this incident, is, that the queen was watching for a signal, which was to reveal to her the house where a non-juring priest awaited her passage, in order to give her absolution.

The countenance of Marie Antoinette exhibited the greatest emotion when, on entering the Place de la Revolution, she beheld the palace and gardens of the Tuileries: but she soon resumed her calmness, and, aided by the priest and the executioner, quickly ascended the scaffold. In doing so, she trod by chance on the foot of Sanson; he uttered an exclamation of pain. "Forgive me," she gently said. Her bearing in that solemn moment was an impressive union of calmness and dignity, as all the eye-witnesses of this scene—one of whom we know personally—have testified. She was attired in a narrow dress of white *piqué;* a close white cap could not entirely conceal her hair, long since blanched by grief. Scarcely any traces now remained of her once dazzling loveliness; but her features, though thin and pale, were still majestic; a deep red circle surrounded her eyes, and betrayed the ceaseless weeping of her latter years. Thus changed, from the gay, beautiful vision they had enthusiastically welcomed twenty-three years before, the widowed queen of France now stood on a scaffold before her people. She knelt and prayed for

a few seconds in a low tone, then rose and calmly delivered herself over to the executioner. When her head had fallen beneath the knife of the guillotine, he held it up, and walked round the scaffold shewing it to the people, and shouting in a loud tone, "Vive la Republique!" The crowd caught up the cry, which filled the whole place.

Thus perished, in her thirty-seventh year, the widow of the greatest king in Europe. The daughter of Maria Theresa, though less fortunate, was not less heroic than her mother. Her whole history, and the severest judgment against her, may be summed up in her own words—"Faults, not crimes." Her errors were those of her judgment, never of her heart. Had she survived the revolution, she would, however, have been judged with more severity. History would have asked her to account for her husband's fall and death, and she has only escaped this reproach by sharing his destiny. There are few tasks more difficult than that of speaking historically of Marie Antoinette. So much of all that the human heart pities and reveres is blended with her name, that those shades in her character which, from her position, produced consequences so fatal are well-nigh forgotten. We cannot speak of the light and frivolous queen, without thinking of the pale prisoner of the Temple and the Conciergerie: and it seems strange harshness to dwell on indiscretions of temper and conduct destined to be expiated by years of weeping anguish and death on a scaffold.

Whatever were the errors of Marie Antoinette, her enemies, by immolating her, have done much to efface them. Their stern policy might deem the death of the king necessary, but, from the moment she became a widow, the queen was a conquered foe, whom it was impolitic and base to sacrifice. Animated by an unworthy spirit of vengeance, they could not rest until they had obtained her life. The revolution felt truly that Marie Antoinette had been its most unrelenting opponent; and, for this, it doomed her to perish: so inveterate had been the struggle between them, that a whole nation did not disdain to avenge itself on a woman. But the vengeance,

thus cowardly taken, recoiled for ever, and is an eternal reproach to those who had not the magnanimity to forgive.

Nothing is more characteristic of Marie Antoinette than her attitude during her last hours. When they parted, her mother had said to her, "Think of me in the time of sorrow or danger." That time had come; and, mindful of her words, her daughter seemed to gather to her aid all the pride of her race. She wrapped herself in a silent reserve; disdaining to hold converse with those who might conquer, but could not subdue her. At the tribunal her fingers wandered idly over the arm of her chair, as if she were touching the keys of some musical instrument. She looked abstracted during the whole time: indifferent when her sentence was read. The constitutional priests could draw nothing save monosyllables from her. She was not haughty, defiant, or despairing: her bearing cannot be characterised as that of the queen or the woman. With worldly pomp or pride she had long done, and her mother's feelings slept in her heart far beyond human ken. She forgave her enemies; but more, perhaps, from proud disdain than because the heavenly peace of mercy had descended into her soul. A stern resolve to accomplish her fate unshrinkingly, sustained her through her last bitter trial. Perhaps the old thought: "History awaits us!" haunted her even then. She made not one effort to soften the crowd; she spoke not a word for her justification: she perished unyielding, and proudly silent to the last.

CHAPTER VII.

MADAME ROLAND: HER CAPTIVITY, TRIAL, AND DEATH.

As the heroines of the revolution pass before us in succession, it is sad to perceive how the great, the beautiful, and the gifted seem to have had but one destiny—the prison and the scaffold. Was that, then, the bourne to which the lofty heroism of Marie Antoinette, the sacrificial furor of Charlotte Corday, and the enthusiasm and genius of Madame Roland alike tended? Did heroism, beauty, and devotedness deserve no better fate?

But this similarity of destiny implied no similarity of feeling or character. Even Charlotte Corday differs widely from Madame Roland, herself so different from Marie Antoinette. The most opposite actions led to the same result: every page in the history of those evil times is equally stained with blood. We left Madame Roland as she entered the Abbaye, a captive; we have now to follow her to the scaffold.

Less affected by her arrest than by the fate of the party with whom she fell, Madame Roland was absorbed by the cries and tumult of the streets, which reached even her remote cell. She listened with a beating heart to every sound, and waited with feverish anxiety for the evening's news. It came, but brought no decisive tidings; overpowered with fatigue, she sank at length into a heavy slumber. The next morning she read in the journal which the gaoler brought her the decree of arrest against the twenty-two Girondists. The paper fell from her hands: "My country is lost!" she passionately exclaimed; and she bade a last and bitter farewell

to those hopes of happiness and sublime illusions which her soul had cherished so long.

But if she abandoned enthusiastic dreams, her faith in truth and virtue remained unshaken. No disaster could disturb the serenity of her soul—no fear subdue its energy. Her mode of life in her prison was regulated and composed: political agitation had vanished; she seemed to have gone back to the pure and happy days of her youth, securely spent beneath her father's humble roof. She made every necessary effort to procure her freedom: she wrote to the Assembly, protesting against her illegal arrest; she sent remonstrances to the sections; but when these efforts remained unavailing, she betrayed neither despondency nor surprise. Her first care was to procure a few books: Thomson, Plutarch, and Tacitus soothed and fortified her soul. When she felt wearied with thought and solitude, she relaxed her mind by drawing. Flowers, with which the few friends who still visited her in her adversity provided her, filled her gloomy cell with their fragrance and beauty, and appeased her captive's longing for that loveliness of nature which was never more to bless her yearning heart.

After a captivity of twenty-four days, Madame Roland was unexpectedly released. The order for her liberation stated that there was nothing against her. She left her cell in the Abbaye—which was afterwards tenanted by two kindred spirits, Brissot and Charlotte Corday—and hastened home with a heart full of joy. Scarcely had she passed the threshold of her dwelling when she was again apprehended. Her release was only owing to the persevering hatred of her enemies; her first apprehension being grossly illegal, they took this method of securing their victim. Madame Roland, without being even allowed to embrace her child, was immediately conveyed to Sainte-Pélagie, the prison usually awarded to women of dissolute life. The son of her landlady was afterwards sent to the guillotine for having protested against her apprehension. The shock she thus experienced proved at first too much for the fortitude of Madame Roland. Her soul for several days

remained overwhelmed with grief; but she gradually regained her composure, and felt almost indignant at her previous weakness. She now freely made the sacrifice of her life, which she perceived was forfeited to the hatred of her foes; but she resolved to use nobly whatever of it was still left, and with that independence of her faculties "which a strong soul preserves even in chains, and which disappoints the most eager foes."*

The sufferings of Madame Roland in her new prison were at first very severe. She was compelled to inhabit a narrow cell, where her ears were constantly assailed by the infamous language of the neighbouring prostitutes. The compassion of Madame Bonchaud, the gaoler's wife, softened her captivity. Her room was exchanged for another. She was allowed the enjoyment of comforts, and even of a few luxuries: a jessamine hid the bars of her window, and a hired piano beguiled the tediousness of her prison hours. But the kindness she experienced did not blind her to her ultimate fate: for that fate she now prepared, by beginning her "Memoirs" on the 9th of August 1793.

The enemies of Madame Roland had long assailed her private and public character with the coarsest and most calumnious imputations. She resolved to lay bare her life from childhood to the present hour, and thus solemnly appeal from the judgment of her contemporaries to that of posterity. Her Memoirs depict Madame Roland as no other pen can ever paint her. We see her there as she was: a beautiful, real being, heroic and serene, and bearing, through all her rashness and pride, the tokens of a soul so noble and so pure as will call forth the admiration and reverence of future ages. The charming ease and grace with which she retraces the history of her childhood, the sudden transition from those fresh and pure images of the past to the fearful gloom of the present, the burning eloquence of her indignation against the tyrants of France, the commanding strength of mind which she unconsciously displays, render these Memoirs almost unique: not, indeed, as a literary production, great as their merits are, but

* Memoirs, p. 202, vol. ii.

as a work destined to fasten with deep and irresistible power on the human heart.

These Memoirs possess, moreover, a dramatic interest, peculiar to themselves and to the circumstances under which they were written. When we read of the enthusiastic child poring over the old volume of Plutarch, we think of her who writes those pages, in a prison, with the scaffold awaiting its victim. She herself interrupts those pictures of her childhood to weep, not over her fate, but over her friends and her country. In the brief and passionate eloquence with which she draws the fearful picture of oppressed and degraded France, we perceive the source of her former power, and recognise the soul of the Gironde. The pages of those Memoirs, which she wrote and confided by stealth to her friend Champagneux, are occasionally broken off with mournful intimations that they may never be finished. On the 5th of September 1793, we find her writing thus, in a note to Champagneux—"I cut this copy in order to place what is written in the little box. When I perceive that a revolutionary army has been decreed, that new tribunals of blood are being formed, that the land is menaced with famine, and that tyrants no longer know what to do, I feel that they are going to make new victims, and that no one is assured of life."

Conscious of her approaching fate, she hurried over her task: the last pages of the Memoirs bear evident traces of the haste with which they were written. She expresses herself thus in October—"I have been interrupted, in order to be informed that I am comprised in the act of accusation with Brissot, and so many other deputies recently arrested. The tyrants think to fill the chasm open before them by casting in honest men; but they shall fall into it after them. I do not fear to go to the scaffold in such good company: there would be shame in living amongst guilty wretches. I shall send this copy and continue with another, if I am not prevented. Friday, 4th of October; birthday of my daughter, who is this day twelve years old."

The thought of her daughter was the only one that could

disturb her heroic serenity. Helen-Maria Williams has left the following account of a visit which she paid to Madame Roland in the prison of Sainte-Pélagie: "Her soul, superior to circumstances, retained its accustomed serenity, and she conversed with the same animated cheerfulness in her little cell as she used to do in the hotel of the minister. She had provided herself with a few books, and I found her reading Plutarch. She told me that she expected to die; and the look of placid resignation with which she said it, convinced me that she was prepared to met death with a firmness worthy of her exalted character. When I inquired after her daughter, an only child of twelve years of age, she burst into tears; and, at the overwhelming recollection of her husband and child, the courage of the victim of liberty was lost in the feelings of the wife and the mother."

With the exception of Vergniaud and a few more, the Girondists were not all aware of their destiny: Brissot considered his acquittal possible. Jealous of the honour of her friend, and unwilling that he should be led to betray any unworthy weakness, Madame Roland wrote to him from her prison, and stoically undeceived him. Nothing could shew in a stronger light the severe truthfulness of her friendship.

Towards the close of her imprisonment, Madame Roland received several offers of escape; of which she refused to avail herself. One of those offers came from Madame Bonchaud, the gaoler's wife, who had conceived a warm attachment for her prisoner, and passionately entreated her to allow herself to be saved. No prayers could induce Madame Roland to comply. Henriette Cannet, one of the convent friends to whom she addressed the long correspondence recently published, visited her in her prison for the same purpose. Henriette, who was somewhat older than her friend, had been destined by her parents for M. Roland, whom she secretly loved; she, however, approved his choice when he preferred and married Manon, and the harmony of their friendship was not once disturbed by this event. Madame Roland hurriedly alludes to the offer of Henriette towards the close of her Me-

moirs. It was thus related by Henriette herself to a friend: "I was a widow," said she, "and I had no children; Madame Roland, on the contrary, had a husband advanced in years and a lovely little girl: both needed her utmost care. What could be more natural than for me to expose my useless life in order to save hers, so precious to her family? I wanted her to exchange her attire for mine, and to endeavour to escape whilst I remained behind. But neither prayers nor tears availed. 'They would kill thee, my good Henriette,' she unceasingly repeated: 'thy blood would ever fall on me. Sooner would I suffer death a thousand times, than reproach myself with thine!' Seeing that nothing could move her, I bade her farewell: to behold her no more."

Madame Roland at first thought that she was to be tried with the Girondists; but the judges dreaded the effect of her beauty and eloquence, and she was not called forward even as a witness. The twenty-two Girondists heard their sentence, and met its execution without shrinking. Young, patriotic, and some of them gifted with surpassing eloquence, they perished on the fatal Place de la Revolution for having resisted the progress of the Reign of Terror. They acted in the spirit of the two noble lines of their friend, Condorcet:—

"Ils m'ont dit: Choisis d'être oppresseur ou victime;
J'embrassai le malheur, et leur laissai le crime."

And this it is that has purified and ennobled their memory. If they yielded too much to popular excesses, they heroically withstood the most fearful tyranny on record. Their resistance was sealed with blood; but the first shed was their own: when their errors are remembered, this will not be forgotten.

On the day of their execution, 31st of October 1793, Madame Roland was transferred to the Conciergerie, which they had just left for the scaffold, and thrown into a damp and gloomy dungeon. She had no bed, until one of the prisoners gave her up his; and, notwithstanding the severity of the weather, she was allowed no covering. Her room was close to that which Marie Antoinette had left a few days

before her arrival. There was a strange link between the destinies of those two women. Born within a few months of each other—one in the sheltering obscurity of the French bourgeoisie, the other on the steps of an imperial throne—they met in antagonism on the stormy path of the French revolution. Both were beautiful, ardent, and heroic, and helped to ruin, by their imprudence, the opposite causes to which they clung. In her republican ardour, Madame Roland hastened the fall of Marie Antoinette; but it was, after enjoying a brief triumph, to end by following the fallen queen in her dungeon, and to perish on the same scaffold. Opposed in life, the two rivals met in death: the revolutionary axe knew no distinction of victims.

In this her last prison, Madame Roland displayed her habitual firmness. On the day following her arrival, she was examined for three hours by the judge, David. Her eloquence and presence of mind did not once forsake her. She wrote to the last; as if it were beyond the power of external events to disturb her serenity. She often spoke at the iron grating which divided the part of the prison in which men were confined from that which she inhabited. Riouffe, one of the few amongst those who beheld her then, that survived the Reign of Terror, thus describes the effect she produced upon him: "Something more than what usually appears in the looks of woman painted itself in her large dark eyes, full of expression and sweetness. She spoke at the grating with the freedom and courage of a great man. We were all attentive around her, in a sort of admiration and amazement. Her discourse was grave, without coldness. She expressed herself with a purity, a harmony, and a prosody, that rendered her language a music with which the ear never became sated. She never spoke of the deputies who had perished, save with respect; but at the same time without effeminate pity: she even reproached them with not having taken sufficiently vigorous measures. She generally designated them as 'our friends.' She often called Clavière, in order to speak to him. Sometimes the feelings of her sex prevailed, and the traces of tears

shewed that she had been weeping at the thought of her child and her husband. This mixture of strength and weakness rendered her more interesting. The woman who attended her said to me one day,—'Before you she collects her strength, but in her own room she will sit three hours, sometimes, leaning on her window and weeping.'"

Although without a doubt of her ultimate fate, she took notes for her interrogatories, and prepared her defence from a feeling of duty; she addressed several farewell letters to those she had loved, amongst the rest to an attached female servant. "Remember thy mother," she wrote to her youthful daughter; "be worthy of thy parents: they leave thee great examples, and if thou knowest how to profit by them, thine shall not be a useless life. Farewell, beloved child. . . . . A time may come when thou shalt be able to judge of the effort I now make not to allow myself to be softened by thy gentle image. I press thee to my bosom. Farewell, Eudora!"

The day before her trial, Madame Roland was visited by her counsel, Chauveau de la Garde, the defender of Charlotte Corday and Marie Antoinette. She drew a ring from her finger, and said, "To-morrow, I shall be no more. I know the fate which awaits me. Your kind assistance cannot avail aught for me, and would but endanger you, without saving my life. I pray you, therefore, not to come to the tribunal, but to accept of this last testimony of my regard." Early on the following day she appeared before the revolutionary tribunal, attired in white as a symbol of her innocence. She had been refused the means of dressing her long dark hair, which fell in thick waves about her neck and shoulders, and down to her waist. Never had she looked more lovely. "She would have softened the hardest hearts," said Riouffe; "but had those monsters hearts?" Her trial was, like that of the Girondists, a mockery of all justice. She was not allowed to read her defence: the president interrupted her repeatedly, and when she appealed to the people, they answered with cries of "To the guillotine!" Insulting questions affecting her honour were addressed to her by Fouquier

Tinville. Tears of indignant shame rose to her eyes; but she answered him with such eloquent scorn that her replies were immediately checked, lest they should influence the jury. No injustice could, however, subdue her proud and dignified bearing. She gloried openly in that which her enemies made a subject of reproach. She declared herself proud of being the wife of Roland, and of having been the friend of the martyred Girondists. Her innocence was so evident, that, in order to be able to convict her of some ostensible crime, the judge was compelled to ask her to reveal the asylum of her husband. She refused to do so, declaring that she knew of no law by which she could be obliged to violate the strongest feelings of nature. This sufficed, and she was immediately condemned.

On hearing her sentence read, she rose, and said with mingled irony and dignity, "I must thank you for thinking me worthy of sharing the fate of the great men whom you have assassinated. I will endeavour to imitate their firmness on the scaffold." She left the hall of judgment, and returned to the Conciergerie with a light and rapid step that seemed to betoken a feeling of inward joy. All the prisoners were waiting to see her appear under the gloomy vault which was to give forth so many victims. Passing her hand across her neck, with a quick and significant gesture, she intimated that she had been condemned, and that the sentence was death. Though she had opium in her possession, she nobly disdained to commit suicide. She re-entered her room for a few hours, and then ascended the last of the carts which were that day, 10th of November 1793, going to the scaffold. Her pure white garments and dark-flowing tresses increased the chaste and spiritual character of her beauty. She was calm, but with a higher calmness than that of resignation. Hers was the serenity of a noble soul in its last and solemn triumph, when the struggle between life and death is past. She knew that martyrdom, even more so than genius, can confer fame: the scaffold was for her but the threshold of a glorious immortality.

Madame Roland was seated in the cart with an infirm old man named La Marche, who wept and testified the deepest dejection as they proceeded to the place of execution. The heroic-souled woman did not disdain to administer gentle consolation to her weak companion. She endeavoured to inspire him with her own serene and cheerful courage, and succeeded in making him smile several times during their progress. The scaffold stood on what was then the Place de la Revolution, a naked dreary space extending between the gardens of the Tuileries and the Champs Elysées. This spot, now known as the Place de la Concorde, is perhaps the most magnificent place in Europe. One of the two marble fountains with which it is adorned has been erected on the spot where the red guillotine formerly received the noblest blood of France, and the Egyptian obelisk rises where the clay statue of a hollow freedom looked down on the instrument of death.

The cart which bore Madame Roland and her companion stopped at the foot of the scaffold. La Marche was pale and trembling. A feeling of generous and sublime compassion filled Madame Roland's heart in this last moment. The privilege of ascending the scaffold first, and being thus spared the lingering torture of beholding her companion's death, had been granted to her as a woman: she resolved to waive her right in favour of the infirm and terrified old man. Turning towards him, she gently said, "Go first: let me at least spare you the pain of seeing my blood shed." The executioner, of whom she begged that this last indulgence might be granted to her companion, refused to accede to the proposed arrangement, telling her his orders were that she should die first. "But you cannot, I am sure," she replied, with a serene smile, "refuse the last request of a lady." He still hesitated, but ended at length by complying with her desire.

When the execution of La Marche was over, Madame Roland ascended the scaffold in her turn: she gazed for a while on the statue of Liberty, which seemed to have been placed in bitter mockery near the guillotine, and bowing gravely before it, pronounced the memorable words, "Ah,

Liberty! how many crimes are committed in thy name!" With this last protest against the stern tyranny which had usurped the name of republican freedom, she delivered herself over to the executioner and accomplished her destiny.

It is said that on her way to the scaffold, and almost at the foot of the guillotine, Madame Roland asked for a pen and some paper, in order to write down the deep and unusual emotions which approaching death had awakened in her soul. The request was refused: it was a strange and solemn one to make at such an hour, when she stood on the very threshold of earthly life and eternity. Did she wish to continue her unfinished Memoirs to the last? Or to pour forth once more her burning eloquence against the tyrants of France? Never were her calm fearlessness of death itself, and her longing desire not to pass away from life without leaving some further record of her better part behind, more strongly displayed. What would not posterity now give for that unwritten page? Her thoughts would have flown calmly even then; for she had that serenity which is true courage; but the last breathings of that heroic spirit were not destined to be revealed on earth.

There is in the stoicism of Madame Roland something so extraordinary that many persons have been repelled by it from a closer study of her character. Women have often died with as much heroism, but few have met death so unshrinkingly. This feeling did not arise in Madame Roland from indifference to life: she knew how to value it rightly; but, if purchased at the cost of honour, she held it worthless. She had mourned over her premature fate, and wept for hours in her prison; she was serene and undaunted on the scaffold: the struggle was then past: for all strong minds—and they alone can feel deeply—the bitterness of a sacrifice lies not in the hour of its external accomplishment, but in that by which it has been preceded. Was it on the cross that the Saviour of mankind said, "O Father, take this cup from me;" or when, bending beneath the weight of His lonely agony, He watched and prayed on the Olive Mount?

The stoicism of Madame Roland has been regarded as a proof that she was unwomanly. She perhaps lacked that humility which exists in those souls alone who feel the nothingness of man before the infinite greatness of God: but men are seldom attracted by unfeminine women; and yet all the Girondists, and at first the Mountaineers, gathered around her, and, notwithstanding their mutual distrust, long remained bound by a spell they could not shake off. If she failed in the gentler virtues of woman, why was she so sincerely loved by those who approached her? Her faithful female servant, on learning the death of her mistress, was seized with a grief so deep, that, presenting herself before the revolutionary tribunal, she asked the sanguinary judges who had condemned Madame Roland to allow her to perish on the same scaffold: the violence of her despair caused them to dismiss her as insane. A man named Lecoq, who had been employed by Madame Roland in some menial capacity, and who had conceived for her the most devoted attachment, also appeared before the tribunal with a similar request; his prayer was granted: he was condemned, and immediately guillotined.

When the fugitive and remaining Girondists learned, in their retreat, the death of the beautiful and heroic woman around whom they had formerly gathered, and whose eloquence had so often cheered them, they were filled with sorrow and horror. Buzot remained for several days delirious: the depth of his grief revealed the fervour of the attachment he is asserted to have felt for Madame Roland.

She had foretold that Roland would not survive her: her prediction was fulfilled. His first intention, on learning her death, was to proceed to Paris, appear in the Convention, and there, after solemnly upbraiding the Mountaineers for the murder of his wife, either to perish by their hands or die on the scaffold. The consideration that his property would be forfeited to the state if he were judicially condemned, and that his only child would thus be left destitute, made him alter his decision and resolve on being the instrument of his own death. After bidding the friends to whose kindness he owed an asylum

a last farewell, he left them, and proceeded alone on the road leading from Rouen to Paris. A few passengers found him the next morning seated at the foot of a tree, and reclining against the trunk. He had stabbed himself to the heart, and was quite dead: his whole attitude was calm and composed, like that of a man in a deep slumber: he had fastened to his dress a piece of paper, on which were written the following words, "Whoever thou mayst be, respect these remains; they are those of a virtuous man: on learning the death of my wife, I would not remain one day longer in a world stained with crimes."

The death of Madame Roland will remain as one of the greatest stains on the history of the revolution. And yet it is difficult to lament that death—

"After life's fitful fever, she sleeps well."

It is well for her to die thus, in the noonday of life; her pure and heroic dreams still fresh in her soul; her noble blood poured freely fourth for the cause she had loved; her name beyond the reach of reproach or doubt. She died young; but what would have been her fate if she had passed unscathed through the days of terror, and lived? To be contemned; to see her motives misunderstood; to be accused of vanity, insincerity, and pride; to be stigmatised as unwomanly in her conduct and feelings: such might have been her destiny, until, bowed down by years, she carried an obscure and unhonoured name to the grave. "To die at the right time," has been pronounced by Chateaubriand a condition of glory; that condition Madame Roland fulfilled: it was well for herself and for posterity: happiness and length of days are not the only objects of human life. To be faithful to the truth within us is far better, and more noble, than to live. A destiny like hers outweighed all suffering and all sorrow: she felt it, and this it was that upheld her to the last.

Hers is one of those names which, through all the differences of political and religious creeds, mankind should keep with reverent memory. If she erred, she erred nobly; for it

was through a fervent and exaggerated faith in freedom and humanity. Higher are such errors than the cold virtues the angel reproved through him of Patmos.*

It requires little knowledge of the revolutionary era to see at a glance, that, being cast on such times, Madame Roland could not have escaped her destiny. On a retrospective view of that great drama, it almost seems as though the parts of all the actors had been marked out in advance by fate. Hers was that of one who could not live in abject fear; behold deeds of blood, yet be silent: who must speak out, though the scaffold were in view; pour forth her indignant soul and die a martyr, if not to freedom, at least to truth. For in those days, so aptly named Days of Terror, it was the craven who lived, and the brave, whatever their political creed might be, who perished.

Eventful as is the history of the French revolution, it offers few pages so touching as those which relate to Madame Roland. Beautiful, heroic, devoted, and accomplished, she spent the greater portion of her life in obscurity, appeared in the world for a few brief moments, acted her part, and died on a scaffold. Fidelity to its own impulses is the test of a noble nature. Judged by that test, Madame Roland stands pure before us. Nor will her name pass forgotten. It is imperishably associated with some of the most stirring recollections of her country: with its noble, though vain, dreams of freedom, and the story of its brave and heroic men.

* Apoc. iii. 15, 16.

CHAPTER VIII.

WOMAN UNDER THE REIGN OF TERROR.

ALTHOUGH we have brought forward, and noticed separately, a few prominent heroines of the revolution, it must not be concluded that there was anything singular in the end of these illustrious victims, howsoever remarkable their character or destiny may have been otherwise. The scaffold on which they perished was daily stained with the blood of the lowly and the great. Crime or virtue, eminence or obscurity, met the same fate. The Reign of Terror had begun.

We have seen how, after the massacres of September, the Girondists commenced against the Jacobins that memorable struggle which ended with their fall. They foresaw the rule of blood which their antagonists wished to establish; they opposed it, and had the honour of perishing amongst its earliest victims. Madame Roland, who urged them on in their resistance, Charlotte Corday, who avenged them, both shared their fate. Had the Girondists succeeded, the blood of a widowed and defenceless queen would never have been shed, and crimes much darker still might have been spared to France.

The fall of this party on the 31st of May 1793, occurred at a period when the internal convulsions of France menaced the cause of the revolution on every side. La Vendée had risen, Lyons was in open revolt, and every province protested and murmured against the tyranny of Paris. A fanatic named Chalier endeavoured to renew at Lyons the scenes of blood which disgraced the capital. In the month of September 1792, a band of assassins murdered eleven officers confined in the fort of Pierre-Encise. The beautiful Mademoiselle

de Bellecice, daughter of the governor, heroically threw herself between the murderers and their victims, and was severely wounded in her vain attempt to save the prisoners. The Lyonnese, indignant at the sanguinary sway Chalier sought to fasten upon them, effected a reaction, and condemned him to perish: the first victim of the guillotine which he had brought and erected for his opponents. These events occurred precisely at the time when the Girondists were conquered at Paris by the Mountaineers.

The citizens of Lyons were too much committed to retract: encouraged by the fugitive royalists and Girondists, who had found a refuge in their city, they resolved to brave the Convention. They hoped and believed that similar insurrections would rise throughout all France. Some of them counted on the foreign troops promised by the exiled princes; and all felt that, were they even doomed to fall, it was better to perish in the defence of their city, than to yield themselves up without a struggle to the tyranny of the Jacobins. The siege of Lyons, which lasted two months, is celebrated even amongst the memorable and fatal events of the French revolution. The most indomitable heroism was displayed on one side, and the most persevering cruelty on the other. It was not until the town was nearly in ruins, and its defenders had been reduced to one-half of their original number, by death and famine, that the Lyonnese at length resolved to surrender. Terror immediately entered their walls with the triumphant Jacobins. The fury of the conquerors resembled insanity. They changed the name of Lyons, and decreed that it should be demolished. Fifteen millions were spent in destroying the finest buildings of this wealthy city. The prisons were crowded to suffocation; victims of either sex and every age were guillotined, until the waters of the Rhone became reddened with their blood; when this mode of death was not found sufficiently expeditious, rows of two hundred prisoners were cannonaded and shot at once, in the plains outside the walls.

The women of Lyons displayed a singular degrée of heroism

during the whole time of the siege, and, after the surrender of the city, many fought with their husbands and brothers at the breach; and, like them, expiated their patriotism on a scaffold. Amongst them was a beautiful girl of seventeen, named Marie Adrian. The judges, touched with her beauty, and struck with her courageous replies, asked her what she would do if they were to grant her her life. "I would kill you, as the enemies of my country," replied the undaunted girl. She ascended the scaffold with a firm step. After her execution the following letter, written with blood, was found in her bosom. It came from her affianced lover, at whose side she had fought, and who had been shot a few days before, in the plain of the Brotteaux. "At this hour to-morrow," he wrote, "I shall be no more. I will not die without saying once more, I love thee. Were my pardon offered me to say the contrary, I should refuse it. I have no ink: I opened a vein to write to thee with my blood. Would that I might mingle it with thine throughout eternity. Adieu, my dear Marie, weep not: let the angels find thee as beautiful as I shall in heaven. I go to wait for thee: tarry not long."

Death became a boon eagerly sought for by those who survived the massacres around them. A young girl presented herself before the tribunal, and exclaimed, addressing the judges, "You have killed my father, my brothers, and my betrothed; you have left me nothing to live for: kill me now." Her request was refused, and in her despair she threw herself into the Rhone. Another girl brought before the tribunal displayed a contempt of life greater still; because it was not inspired by wounded affection, but by a fervent indignation against the oppressors of her countrymen. She was accused of refusing to wear the national cockade. "Why wilt thou not wear the sign of the people?" asked the president. "Because you wear it," she answered. The president wishing, nevertheless, to save her, made a sign to the gaoler behind her, who fastened the cockade in her hair; but she tore it away indignantly, preferring death to the dishonour of

wearing a badge which, from the rallying sign of freedom, had become that of tyranny.

But female heroism and devotedness were still more touchingly displayed in the prisons of Lyons, which were chiefly filled with the compromised defenders of the city. Every morning, crowds of women might be seen waiting at the prison gates to gain admittance. Threats or insults could not turn them away from their task of love. They obtained by bribery what the pity of the gaolers would have denied: the privilege of entering the prisons, clothing and feeding the inmates, often in a fearful state of destitution, attending on them in their sickness, cleaning their wretched cells, and favouring escapes at the peril of their own lives. Amongst the devoted Lyonnese women, none ought to occupy a more distinguished place than Mademoiselle Delleglace. Her father was arrested and ordered to be transferred from Lyons to Paris. His daughter requested to accompany him, but was inhumanly refused. She, nevertheless, resolved to follow him, and accordingly travelled on foot the distance of a hundred and nineteen leagues. When she reached Paris, her father was in the Conciergerie, and she was not permitted to see him. For three months she solicited his freedom from all the influential men of the day, and at length succeeded in accomplishing her object. M. Delleglace was liberated, and set out for Lyons with his overjoyed daughter. But the devoted girl was never more to behold the home she had won back for her father. The frail form which had heroically endured fatigues so great could not bear the slow progress of an easy journey. The superhuman strength by which she had been sustained until the purpose of her heart was won, vanished now that it was no longer needed for the accomplishment of her holy task. She fell ill on the way, declined rapidly, and died within a week of her father's liberation.

Happy were those who died, like Mademoiselle Delleglace, and who did not live to behold the misery and desolation of the land. Women, pious, pure, and lowly, were not more spared than if they had been wealthy and great. It almost

seemed as if it were a crime to live. At the time of the siege of Lyons, there dwelt in that city a single woman of great generosity and virtue, named Françoise Michallet, and who, like Dorcas in the apostolic times, was known by the good works and alms-deeds which she did. She was sent to prison for confessing her attachment to the proscribed faith: for such had Christianity now become. From the loathsome dungeon where she was confined, she wrote in the following terms to one of her friends: "When shall we leave this land of malediction and death: this land whence virtue is almost banished, and where crime is greeted into a divinity? O death, how blessed art thou to the heart that sigheth for its God!" Françoise was soon condemned by the tribunal; she slept on the night preceding her execution with more tranquillity than she had yet manifested. Before going forth to death, she divested herself of all the clothes with which she could dispense, and even took off her shoes and stockings, in order to distribute them amongst the poor. It was a damp and chill February morning, and one of the turnkeys observed to her that she would catch cold. "Not for long," was her calm and laconic reply. She was executed with eleven women and one man, a priest. Françoise Michallet asked as a favour to perish last, in order to exhort and encourage her companions to the end. When we see such great victims as Marie Antoinette and Madame Roland dying courageously, we may, without suspecting their firmness, believe that they were not indifferent to the judgment which posterity would pass on their last moments; but what had the obscure girl of Lyons to hope from fame, when she asked to see twelve heads fall before her own in order that she might accomplish her heroic and Christian task?

Similar scenes were enacted throughout all France. The representatives of the people sent by the Convention to the provinces exercised their unlimited power with unparalleled insolence and tyranny. They seized on the property of inoffensive citizens, sent them and their families to death, burned out whole villages, and devastated the country; as if, instead

of their own native land, it were the unfriendly soil of a conquered foe. Persons remotely suspected of royalism or federalism were, without remission, doomed to die. Wealth and talents became so many crimes worthy of death. Some perished because they were sad, others because they were too gay. Individuals were forbidden, as in Lyons, to weep for their murdered relatives: they were expected to rejoice when the head of one they loved had fallen beneath the knife of the guillotine. Amongst the great offences of those times was public or even private adherence to Christianity. It is true that constitutional worship was authorised by the state, but the Atheist faction, headed by Anacharsis Clootz and Hébert, succeeded in causing the churches to be closed, or desecrated by the impious adoration of the Goddess of Reason. As long as this state of things prevailed, and even for a longer period, nonjuring priests, nuns whose convents had been opened, and persons noted for their attachment to religion, were daily hurried to the guillotine.

Maignet, proconsul of the department of Vaucluse, whence he exercised a dictatorial sway over a considerable portion of the south of France, made the town of Orange the seat of his arbitrary power. With the approbation of the Committee of Public Safety, he established a revolutionary tribunal, free from the encumbrance of a jury; but held by five judges, who were to convict without proof whenever they felt satisfied of the guilt of the accused. Thirty-two nuns were amongst the victims which Maignet was thus enabled to immolate. On the 13th of May 1794, forty-two nuns of different orders were thrown at once into the prisons of Orange. They all determined, on the day which followed their incarceration, to adopt the same rule, and share with one another whatever they possessed, like the Christians in the primitive ages of the Church. In the space of two months, thirty-two of these nuns were led to death; ten survived the Reign of Terror. It was generally at nine in the morning that they were summoned, five or six at a time, before the tribunal. Previous to that hour the nuns, who in their prison led a life of monastic regularity,

assembled to read the prayers for the dying, and to renew their baptismal and religious vows. Those who were called away bade their sisters a farewell they knew to be the last. Whilst waiting the hour of their execution, they were placed in a court named the Circus, because, according to a popular tradition, it formed part of an arena where, in the days of Nero, Christians had formerly suffered for their faith. At six in the evening, the general hour of execution, the surviving nuns again read the prayers for the dying; they all prayed in silence, when loud cries from without, accompanied by the sound of the drum, announced the departure of the condemned for the scaffold. When all was over, they filled the prison with the solemn strains of the *Te Deum Laudamus*. Those who perished met their fate with all the enthusiasm of fervent religious conviction, and with that simplicity and resignation characteristic of their sex. Two of the nuns were one day called to the tribunal, somewhat later than the usual hour. "But," observed one of them, with ingenuous earnestness, to the gendarmes, "we have not said our vespers!" "We shall say them in heaven to-day," replied her companion. So far were they from dreading death, that one of them offered herself daily, and unasked, to the gendarmes who came to call her companions. She at last appeared before the tribunal with her sister, and was the only one condemned that day. "Alas!" mournfully cried her sister, "must you, then, go to martyrdom without me? What shall I do in this exile, when you leave me?" Her exile, as she termed it, did not last more than a week. Many of these enthusiastic nuns, on hearing their sentence, thanked the judges for the eternal happiness they were procuring them. Several devoutly kissed the guillotine as the blessed instrument of their martyrdom. The gendarmes who led them to the scaffold, looked upon them with undisguised wonder; and afterwards observed, "These nuns go to death as joyfully as if they went to a wedding."

What were the crimes of these women? That, in an age of unequalled profligacy and corruption, they remained apart, to lead a life of purity and peace, to pray for the erring and

relieve the wretched. That they repudiated the freedom which the revolution gave them, in order to remain faithful to the vows they had willingly embraced: for this they perished.

As severe as the religious persecutions were those which the proconsuls directed against the fugitive Girondists and their adherents. In the province which they had represented with so much courage and eloquence, the proscribed deputies of the Gironde could scarcely find a roof beneath which they might repose in safety. But whilst man shrank from them in fear, they found woman, with few exceptions, ever hospitable and kind. Madame Bouquey, sister-in-law of the Girondist Guadet, left Paris for Saint-Emilion, near Bourdeaux, on purpose to assist him and his friends. She first concealed him, with Salles, in the deep grottoes of Saint-Emilion; to one of which her house gave access through a sort of well thirty feet deep. Hearing of the miserable plight of Barbaroux, Louvet, and Valady, she immediately said, "Let them come." Not long after this, she received intimation of the fact that Buzot and Péthion had been compelled to change their asylum seven times within the space of a fortnight. "Ah! let them come too," exclaimed the kind-hearted woman. They came, and were received as though their presence were not fraught with death. Seven outlawed fugitives now dwelt beneath the roof of Madame Bouquey. Her chief embarrassment was to procure them food: so great was the scarcity which then prevailed, that the municipality only allowed her one pound of bread a day. Potatoes, and a supply of dried beans, accordingly constituted the chief food of her guests. They slept till twelve, in order to spare a breakfast. A vegetable soup formed their dinner. Towards twilight the Girondists left their retreat, and gathered round their kind protectress, who prepared for them as palatable a supper as prudence would allow her to procure, and which she seldom touched herself in order to leave the more for them. Whilst she behaved thus generously, the country was filled with emissaries of the Jacobins, who, conscious that the Girondists were concealed in

the vicinity, uttered the most fearful threats against them and those by whom they were sheltered. From her connexion with Guadet, Madame Bouquey was especially exposed to their persecutions and domiciliary visits. Although surrounded by persons whom the presence of the Girondists in her house inspired with the most lively alarm, she remained undismayed. "Let the inquisitors come," she gaily said to her protégés; "I am easy, provided it is not you who receive them. All I fear is, that they may arrest me, and then what will become of you?" She kept them a month; but at the end of that time the importunities of her friends prevailed, and, with many tears and bitter regrets, she parted from her guests. Of the seven men she had sheltered, six died on the scaffold; only one, Louvet, lived to narrate the romantic history of his misfortunes and escape. When Guadet was arrested in the house of his father, Madame Bouquey became involved in his ruin and that of his family. Indignant at the insulting questions of the president of the tribunal before which she appeared, she passionately exclaimed: "Yes, monsters!—Beasts of prey! if humanity, if family affection deserve punishment in your opinion, we all merit death." The generous and undaunted woman died with two of the men she had endeavoured to save.

When friendship and pity could inspire such deep and perilous devotedness in the heart of woman, love and conjugal affection might well lead her to brave not less heroically the anger of the oppressors. A woman of Lyons, hearing that her husband was on the point of being arrested, prevailed upon him, by her passionate entreaties, to effect his escape whilst she remained, clad in his attire, to take his place. A Madame Lefort, in one of the western departments, acted with like devotion. The representative of the people, discovering the cheat she had practised upon him, turned towards her, wrathfully exclaiming: "Woman! what have you done?" "My duty—do thine," was her brief reply. A citizen of Riom was transferred to Paris for judgment, and consequently for condemnation. His wife, though not included in the accusation

against him, persisted in accompanying him: they were both guillotined together. Another lady, not being allowed by the gaolers to go with her husband to the tribunal whither he was summoned, killed herself on the spot.

In every rank of life, and with little regard to political feelings, women adopted the most ingenious stratagems to save beloved objects, and often the merest strangers. A prisoner fell ill, and was sent to the hospital of Bourdeaux. The Sister of Charity whose task it was to attend upon him beheld him with interest, and sorrowfully reflected that his recovery would only be the signal for his death. Resolved to save his life, even at the risk of her own, she bade her patient, who was nearly well, feign convulsions, and then death. He obeyed; the nun hastily threw a sheet over his face, and, when the doctor came to pay his daily visit, informed him that the patient had that moment expired. He believed her, without ascertaining the truth of her assertion. In the evening the supposed corpse was conveyed to the dissecting-room. A surgeon in the confidence of the Sister of Charity provided the prisoner with a proper disguise. He left the hospital undetected, and ere long gained the Spanish frontier. His disappearance was perceived on the following day. The nun was questioned and confessed the truth. Her candour excited so much admiration and surprise, that her life was spared. It is also true that the Sisters of Charity were found so necessary in the hospitals of the republic, as to be seldom molested, even when they refused to take the constitutional oath.

M. Caussé, a rich merchant of Toulouse, was apprehended and speedily condemned for the crime of being one of the wealthiest citizens of his native city. The day being far advanced when his sentence was pronounced, the execution was deferred until the following morning. M. Caussé had a beautiful mistress, whom he had formerly loaded with gifts. On learning his condemnation, she sold all she possessed and bought an empty house adjoining the prison. There, in that one night, with the help of a faithful female servant, she

effected an opening through the wall to the cell where she knew that her lover was confined. The prisons were badly guarded, M. Caussé seconded her efforts, and ere long he stood, a free man, in the empty house; where he found a military disguise, provided by his thoughtful mistress. Long before his escape was suspected, he had reached, with her, a place of security, in which they waited the close of the Reign of Terror.

Incidents as strange, improbable, and romantic as those of the wildest fiction abounded in this period of revolutionary history. The long and heroic contests of the Vendeans and the Chouans against the whole republic, possess the hazardous adventure and tone of wild daring which would have delighted a Scott or a Fenimore Cooper; and in deeply thrilling interest they might indeed well bear a comparison with the wars of the Puritans and Jacobites of Scotland, or with the strange and varied scenes, stratagems, and chances of Border life, and hairbreadth escapes of the wild Indian warfare. Women were implicated in this memorable struggle, but without taking in it a leading or striking part. Those whose feelings and affections—the great political guides of women—led them to sympathise with the Vendeans, either perished with them or underwent almost unequalled sufferings, endured with calm and heroic resignation. It is possible, however, that the royalist ladies, who have left such interesting memoirs on this remarkable period of French history, might have acted a far more conspicuous part in the events which they narrate, if the great movement, though headed by nobles, had not been essentially a popular one in its origin.

La Vendée is a wide and secluded district, situated in the west of France, bounded by the Loire on one side, and by the Atlantic Ocean on the other. The chief portion of this tract of land is known by the name of Le Bocage. It is covered with low hills, narrow valleys, and innumerable streams, which traverse it in every direction. These streams, the chief paths of the country, are generally overhung and concealed with the low trees growing on their banks; this peculiarity

has given its name to the Bocage. The character of the Vendeans is simple, honest, truthful, and yet reserved. "Deeds, not words," was their practical maxim: no men promised less and effected more. They were a hardy, frugal race, patient though energetic, prejudiced, deeply religious, and averse to change. From the commencement they disliked the revolution. They already enjoyed as much freedom and happiness as they desired. They had not been bowed down by ages of oppression: they had no wrongs to avenge, no brand of slavery to efface, no thought of past or present abasement to awaken glorious aspirations towards liberty. They cherished the feudal system, so deeply and justly abhorred in the rest of France. It existed with them in all its primitive and patriarchal simplicity. The nobles treated their tenants with justice and kindness; the clergy were moral and pure. Secluded from the rest of France, contented, though ignorant and poor, the peasants neither knew nor understood the deep social evils which had brought on the revolution. They saw with abhorrence and disgust their own priests expelled, in order to make room for the constitutional clergymen; the execution of the king and the laws of conscription added to their indignation. Exasperated at the thought of being compelled to fight for a cause they hated, they rose in arms to fight—but against it. They urged their landlords to lead them to the field. The nobles, though they hoped nothing from this partial movement, thought themselves bound in honour not to recede. They joined and headed the insurrection. It soon acquired formidable proportions, and at one time threatened the existence of the republic itself.

The women of La Vendée shared in all the religious enthusiasm and attachment to past customs which had armed their brothers and husbands. In many villages they kept guard whilst the men were away fighting; they sometimes made prisoners, which they brought in triumph to the commanding officers. Several women took an active share in this eminently national struggle. Two sisters, of fourteen

and fifteen years of age, distinguished themselves by their courage. On the day before the town of Thouars was taken by the Vendeans, a soldier came up to General Lescure, confided to him that she was a girl in man's attire, and, asking him for a pair of shoes, assured him that when he had seen her fight on the following day, he would not think of sending her away. She kept her word, and fought constantly under the eyes of M. de Lescure. "General," she cried out to him several times in the heat of the battle, "you shall not pass me. I shall always be nearer to the *Blues* than you will." The name of *Blues* was that which the Vendeans gave to the republicans; who in return called them "Brigands." The daring girl received a wound in the hand, but she merely held it up, saying to the general: "This is nothing." Her recklessness proved fatal to her: dashing forward amongst the combatants, she perished in the thickest of the fight.

Of the peasant women who thus took up arms, only one survived the civil war: her real name was Jeanne Bordereau; she was generally called *L'Angevin*, from the province of Anjou, whence she came. She fought to avenge the death of her father, killed by the republicans, and performed prodigies of daring bravery. Several noble and royalist ladies displayed similar heroism. Madame de Beauglie, attired like an amazon, a carabine in her hand, commanded thirty cavaliers, equipped and salaried at her expense, on the coast of La Vendée. The young and handsome Madame du Fief, distinguished herself in the army of Charrette; who, without joining the great body of the insurgents, kept up a brisk and separate warfare on the sea-shore. "In the fight of La Bazilière, 1794," observes a historian of this eventful war, "Charrette beheld her, with surprise, rush on the foe, and give an example to the bravest." Madame du Fief survived the war in which she had taken so active a part, and, on the restoration of the Bourbons, was warmly thanked and eulogised for her services by one of the princes of the blood. Such amazonian ladies ranked, however, among the exceptions to the general rule. The Vendean women of every rank

thought far more of giving examples of courageous patience, than of indulging in a daring heroism foreign to their nature, and unsuited to their physical weakness. The pious and truly heroic Mademoiselle de la Rochefoucauld, who accompanied her father in the army of Charrette, and in that reckless general's most perilous expeditions, kept up the courage of the whole army by her unexampled patience and resignation. The memoirs of Madame de la Rochejaquelein and Madame de Bonchamps shew how unremitting and severe were the sufferings of the royalist ladies.

Besides the women who fought in the army, and those who, by their own gentle example, exhorted their friends to bear everything patiently, there was a third class, who, if they did not direct military operations, at least considerably aided the counsels of the Vendean chiefs by their address and devotedness. Mademoiselle Hamelin, of Rennes, consecrated herself to the perilous task of favouring the royalist correspondence. She crossed republican posts in disguise, procured intelligence, carried orders through a hostile country filled with spies, and often braved the dangers of a long journey and almost certain death, in order to negotiate for the Vendeans with the English agents on the coast.

The protracted war of the Chouans in Brittany, although carried on later and somewhat differently from that of La Vendée, was also a royalist and religious struggle against republican principles. It was first organised by the daring Marquis de la Rouarie, noted for his profligacy, his duels, and his wild adventures. Accompanied by his beautiful and devoted relative, Thérèse Moelien, to whom he was himself ardently attached, he went all over Brittany, braving every danger, in order to establish a vast and secret conspiracy. The authorisation given by the Count of Artois to La Rouarie was carried by Thérèse, sewed in her riding-habit; and it is said that, by her eloquence and beauty, she won not a few partisans to her lover's cause. The Marquis de la Rouarie died before his project could be carried into execution. On the eve of his death he gave to Thérèse a list of the conspirators; she

burned it, and was shortly afterwards executed, with a whole family who had buried in their garden important papers relative to the conspiracy.

Though thus checked in its commencement, the Chouannerie subsequently rallied, and emulated the daring heroism, but not always the generosity, of the Vendean warfare. Though prodigies of valour were performed by the insurgent peasants, and though, as in the Combat de Dol, women often rallied them back to victory, when they yielded to republican forces, they were so greatly inferior in numbers to their opponents, that it is their success, and not the defeat by which it was followed, which should astonish. The consequences of that defeat were most deplorable. The cruelties of the republican generals, and of the proconsuls in Brittany and in La Vendée, almost surpass belief. Never was humanity so deeply outraged: the massacres of Lyons do not equal the noyades or drownings of Nantes. If hundreds were immolated by Fouché and Collot d'Herbois, thousands perished by the orders of Carrier. Women and children were shot publicly. The Vendean General d'Elbée was taken by the republicans during the course of the war. His wife refused to leave him: he was shot before her eyes: a similar fate awaited her on the following day. Difference of opinion did not always imply a difference of fate. The republican general Quétineau was obliged to surrender to the Vendeans. They wanted him to join their cause; he refused, and requested to be liberated on parole, in order to justify himself from the imputation of treachery which had been cast upon him. The Vendean generals warned Quétineau of the danger he would thus incur; but his wife, who preferred her husband's honour to his safety, induced him to persist in his resolve. The request was granted: General Quétineau went to Paris, and was condemned to death, unheeded and unheard. The broken-hearted widow asked and obtained leave to share his fate.

Although they chiefly consisted of republicans, the inhabitants of Nantes suffered as much as the royalists, Bretons, and Vendeans, from the fury and cruelty of Carrier. Their devoted

city became the theatre of the most fearful and revolting executions. The Vendean peasants of both sexes met death with the courageous firmness of their race. The women seemed to think less of death itself than of the means of dying with decency: a consolation not often granted by their cynical tyrants. They generally went to death singing an old traditional hymn, of which the burden was that "those who die for God go to paradise." The calm resignation with which these victims of their fervent faith suffered martyrdom was termed fanaticism by their irritated oppressors. It was "fanaticism" which made delicately-reared women walk twelve leagues, through a dreary, marshy country, in a severe winter, in order to hear mass said in one of those retired places where the nonjuring priests had taken refuge: "fanaticism" which caused Marie Papin, a young Vendean peasant, to let herself be slowly massacred by republican soldiers, sooner than reveal the hiding-place of the fugitive "brigands," to whom she was taking food by stealth! Then, thanks to Heaven, such fanaticism was not rare: heroism, undaunted courage, and the love of better things than life and happiness, were not found on the side of the republic alone. Never was the Catholic religion, in all its pomp and glory, so purely, so devoutly followed as when obedience to its laws was death: never were the holy duties of hospitality so devotedly performed as when discovery would have doomed both host and guest to one inevitable fate. Those who talk merely of the debasing power of oppression, know not how it can elevate, how it can purify, the noble struggling soul: how it can awaken resistance, stern, unyielding, and which still triumphs over chains and death, even when to the narrow-minded it seems most subdued. If tyrants knew these things, they might, perchance, seek other methods of tyranny. It is when brute force seems most strong that the moral power of the weak first stands revealed. A nun named sister Saint Monica, but to whom the poor had given the name of their "mother," was brought before one of the revolutionary tribunals in the west of France. The Reign of Terror was at its height, and no counsel would undertake her

defence. "Thou must be very guilty indeed," said the President, banteringly, "since no one will even defend thee." "If I have no defender on earth," replied the gentle nun, looking upwards, "I have at least one in heaven." At the foot of the guillotine she gave to a few poor women, who followed her weepingly, all the garments she could spare, and refused, even under the knife, to save her life by taking the constitutional oath.

It would be difficult to enumerate the women who, throughout all France, braved and suffered death, for having, in spite of every prohibition, sheltered or assisted the proscribed priests. Four sisters were guillotined together at Dijon for this offence; and two sisters, Mademoiselles Barberon, schoolmistresses at Orleans, were sent to Paris for trial, with the priest whom they had vainly endeavoured to save. They both went to the scaffold glorying in their action, and singing in a loud and clear tone the 96th Psalm. M. Billiais, his wife and their two daughters, were condemned at Nantes for a similar action. The father was executed in January 1794, Madame and Mademoiselles Billiais were not guillotined until the month of March. The mother walked firmly to death between her two daughters: their veils were thrown back, and displayed the calm serenity of their features. One of the two maidens was remarkably beautiful. A republican officer beheld her on the way to the guillotine. Filled with pity, and with a sudden feeling of love, he stepped up to her, and offered to save her life if she would become his wife. She refused, preferring death with her mother and her sister. The three women embraced one another tenderly at the foot of the scaffold. Fervent maternal affection rising with the dread hour, made Madame Billiais ask to be the last guillotined, in order that her daughters might not behold her death! Many Vendean women might have escaped their fate, had they not preferred death to dishonour. The noyades, of which Carrier had borrowed the idea from Nero, consisted in having a certain number of victims crowded in a boat furnished with a large trap. On a given signal the trap opened, and the Loire received the con-

demned. These *noyades* were repeated until the waters of the river became corrupted, and spread pestilence in the city. Madame de Jourdain and her three daughters were taken, with a considerable number of other persons, to one of these boats. The beauty of one of the three girls attracted the notice of a soldier, who offered to save her on dishonourable conditions. In order to escape his pressing solicitations, she threw herself from the boat into the river. She fell on a heap of corpses, which prevented her from drowning. She called out for aid, but aid to die, and not to live. "Help me," she cried; "I have not enough water!" The executioners, who were always present to prevent victims from escaping, pushed her in further to a deeper spot.

The conduct of the young and beautiful Mademoiselle de Cuissard, who was led to death with an old female relative, offers another remarkable proof of female purity and unselfish devotedness. She was on the boat at Nantes with her friend, both patiently awaiting their fate, when a republican officer, enamoured of the young girl whom he wished to save, spent three hours, kneeling at her feet, and passionately entreating her to give him the power of delivering her by becoming his wife. He was young, handsome, and his manners and feelings were evidently those of a gentleman. Moved, in spite of herself, at his persistency, Mademoiselle de Cuissard asked, "If I marry you, can you also save my friend?" "Alas!" sadly replied the officer, "I can only save her whom I shall marry." "Then, farewell," replied the heroic girl; and from that moment all his entreaties proved vain: she perished with her relative. Instances are, however, recorded in which, without any compromise of womanly honour or dignity, life was preserved, and not wantonly sacrificed. The most barbarous have moments of shame and remorse.

Deceived by a false amnesty promised to the Vendeans, Agathe de la Rochejaquelein came to Nantes. Instead of thus securing her freedom, she was immediately arrested and taken before Lamberty, the friend and accomplice of Carrier. He was pleased with her appearance. "Are you afraid,

brigande?" he asked. "No, general," she replied. "Then when you feel fear, send for Lamberty." When Agathe apprehended that she was to be included in the noyades, she accordingly sent word to her protector. He took her out alone with him on the Loire in a little boat, with a trap, which he had obtained from Carrier for private murders. He wished to take a dishonourable advantage of her position, and, when she refused to listen to him, threatened to drown her. She ran to the side of the boat, and shewed him that she was ready to die. Struck with admiration at her courage, Lamberty exclaimed: "Your are a brave girl! I will save you." He accordingly concealed her in the bottom of the boat, which he hid amongst some rushes by the river side. For eight days and nights she lay there unperceived, but daily witnessing the executions of the condemned. A man of Nantes, named Sulivan, drew her from this perilous hiding-place, and took her home, in order to pacify his wife by saving a prisoner. This man had betrayed his own brother to the republicans; the horror his wife had conceived for him since then preyed upon his mind, and he wished to appease her, and expiate his crime by performing some good deed. To how much unknown good did the gentle and purifying influence of woman lead in those evil days! The second retreat of Mademoiselle de la Rochejaquelein was soon discovered; Lamberty was accused of the heinous crime of saving women from the noyades, and a friend of his, named Robin, took out Agathe on the river, in order to poniard her. She threw herself at his feet, and the charm of a pure, winning nature again prevailed. Robin, instead of killing her, brought her back, and hid her: she was, however, again detected in her place of concealment, and this time was only saved by the close of the Reign of Terror.

The town of Arras, then under the dominion of an apostate priest named Lebon, beheld scenes as fearful, met with courage as undaunted. Lebon converted the guillotine into a permanent institution. The executioner sat at his table and shared his orgies. When his friend was engaged in the duties of his

office, Lebon sat on a balcony, from which he viewed the executions on the place below, whilst a band, engaged for that purpose, played the Marseillaise or Ca Ira. Lebon frequently interrupted the executions, in order to prolong the tortures of the condemned, by reading to them the bulletin of the victories gained by the republican armies. He did so once when two young Englishwomen were ascending the scaffold. "Aristocrats like you," said he, addressing them, "must hear in their last moments the triumph of our armies." One of the two ladies, named Madame Plunkett, turned towards him, and exclaimed indignantly: "Monster! we, though women, shall die courageously, but thou shalt die like a coward." The excess of tyranny, in which Lebon indulged with impunity, may be conjectured from the following circumstance: He was coming home one evening along the silent streets of Arras, reflecting on evil news he had received from the army, when he heard a young girl singing in one of the private houses. Irritated at this token of freedom and joy, he caused her to be apprehended and sent to the guillotine, with her mother, on the following day. A woman, with a child in her arms, saw them pass on to death. "Thou art not more innocent than that poor young lady," said she, addressing the child, with an irresistible burst of pity and indignation. The remark was overheard, and reported to Lebon, who, without further judgment, sent the compassionate woman to share the fate of the victim she had so imprudently pitied.

When the terror reigned thus inexorably in the provinces, it may be imagined that it did not spare Paris; the seat of that dreadful tyranny which threatened to lay the country waste, and consign her most noble and most gifted children to the grave. But this oppressive power, which developed so much unsuspected evil in the human heart, also brought out the latent good. Madame le Jay, the grasping and apparently selfish mistress of Mirabeau, devoted herself to almost certain death, in order to save proscribed men. After the 31st of May, Condorcet, implicated in the ruin of the Girondists, found an asylum in the house of an obscure widow named

Madame Vernet. He remained with her eight months, during which his kind hostess constantly exerted herself to divert his melancholy, and sometimes playfully addressed him in little couplets, in which she exhorted him to bear his fate patiently. "I have never written any verses," said he to her one day; "but I think you will induce me to make the attempt." It was whilst residing beneath her roof that he composed an epistle, addressed to his wife, in which occur the two fine lines already quoted.* The beautiful Madame de Condorcet was now reduced to the necessity of painting the portraits of the terrorists in order to obtain a livelihood. It was only by stealth that she could visit her husband in his retreat. His thoughts and feelings were almost entirely absorbed by her and their only child, a little girl five years of age. The ardent revolutionist could never mention the names of his wife and daughter without shedding tears. In the "Avis d'un Père Proscrit," which he addressed to his daughter, he spoke to her with great tenderness of her mother's affection and superior mind.

On learning the decree of the Convention, which outlawed and included the proscribed and those who gave them a shelter in the same fate, Condorcet said to his hostess, "I must leave you: were I discovered here, this decree would place you beyond the pale of the law." "But not beyond that of humanity," replied this noble and undaunted woman. So urgent was she in her entreaties for him to remain, that Condorcet was obliged to escape from her house by stealth. He wandered for a few days about the country, but was soon discovered and imprisoned. He committed suicide with poison, which he always kept about him for that purpose. His wife was incarcerated soon after his death. Her first task, when the terror had ceased, was to collect and publish the writings Condorcet had composed during his seclusion. She survived him many years, living in poverty and retirement, and faithful to the last to the republican principles of her husband.

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It was this devoted zeal of woman which irritated the tyrants of France, because it every day snatched new victims from their grasp. When Louvet, after leaving Madame Bouquey, reached Paris, through innumerable perils, he was saved from certain death by the address and courage of the beautiful Lodoïska, who afterwards became his wife. None of his friends would receive him; he had no papers, no passport, no place in which he could lie concealed; the scaffold seemed his only destiny. Unaided, but supported by love, Lodoïska built him a hiding-place in a remote room, and so skilfully executed that it could never be detected by mere eyesight. Here, thanks to that asylum, he remained undiscovered, until a favourable opportunity occurred for him to make his escape to the frontiers.

"When the proscribed of every party met after the 9th of Thermidor," observes Charles de Lacretelle, "the name of woman was covered with universal benedictions."

One man alone, the cold, sceptical ennuyé Saint-Lambert, seemed to dissent from this general praise. Shortly after the cessation of the terror, he read to a circle of ladies a work in which he dealt somewhat severely with their sex. They reminded him of all that woman had done to soften the Reign of Terror. "Well, then, mesdames," he replied with a sneer, "I shall add to this chapter the remark, that women devoted themselves when it was the fashion to do so." So spoke, in his old age, the man who had been loved with so much fervour and constancy by Madame du Chatelet and Madame d'Houdetot.

The opinion of Louvet on this subject is of more worth. He had tested both the generosity and the harshness of woman. If Madame Bouquey had sheltered him, another woman (a friend of Guadet, by whom her honour and fortune had formerly been saved) refused him a glass of water when he sank in a swoon at her door. Yet, notwithstanding this, it is thus Louvet speaks: "Amidst all this degradation, it is consoling to declare, that even in France there still exist beings worthy of liberty. We found them especially amongst

persons of that sex called frivolous and timid. It was from women that we received the most touching attentions, and that courageous aid a generous compassion knows not how to refuse to unmerited misfortunes."

May women long deserve such noble praise!

CHAPTER IX.

WOMAN IN THE PRISONS.

NEVER, perhaps, did the capital of a civilised country offer a spectacle like that which the prisons of Paris presented during the Reign of Terror. Whilst fierce and fanatic men, often repulsively coarse, ruled the destinies of France, individuals most noble by birth, distinguished by station, or eminent by talent, were herded together in prisons, palaces, and private hotels, and thence daily sent in batches (*fournées*) to the guillotine. The number of incarcerated *suspects* at one time amounted to 11,400.

Princes of the blood, generals, statesmen, orators, handsome and fashionable ladies, nuns, men of letters, priests, actors, and dignitaries of the Church, met in these abodes of death, as ardently tenacious of former passions and privileges as they were carelessly indifferent to the present. It was only in a few external circumstances that this social world differed from the gay and frivolous circles of the eighteenth century. Women, regaining all the power so ruthlessly broken in their hands by the great drama of the revolution, once more gave the tone, and ruled coteries. The mania for sentiment had somewhat gone by; brilliant and caustic wit, literary discussions and Epicurean philosophy, recalled the palmy days and sway of Mesdames de Tencin and du Deffand. The imprisoned aristocracy of France laughed at the revolutionary scaffold; as, under royal rule, it had laughed at lettres de cachet and the Bastile: it trifled with death, as it was its wont to trifle with everything: the same daring and frivolous race whom no suffering could subdue or render grave. There was in reality as much pride as levity in this careless bearing: it

was the last haughty defiance of the conquered noble to his plebeian oppressor; and more plainly than with words did it to the exasperated terrorists seem to say, "Send us to death: do your worst; we can still brave both your power and you."

Certain knowledge of the fate to which the *suspects* were doomed, their great number, the difficulty of escape, and the rare instances in which it was attempted by captives to whom France had become a vast prison-house, rendered the gaolers easy and tolerant. The prisoners were permitted to meet freely, and to regulate their amusements and occupations. They generally elected presidents, who distributed the daily tasks, and saw that they were properly performed. Some lit the fires, others swept the rooms and made the beds; a few prepared their own food: the wealthy had their meals brought in to them from their houses, or sent in by a restaurateur; and large sums were spent by the captives in procuring for themselves the delicacies of the season. The poor were generally fed at the expense of their richer companions: the gaolers recommended needy sans-culottes to the care of opulent aristocrats, who generously provided for them. The wealth of a *ci-devant* was thus ascertained by the number of prisoners he maintained; and as much pride was displayed in this singular luxury as had been shewn in the laqueys, horses, and mistresses a noble formerly kept, chiefly for purposes of ostentation. The same spirit which had governed the saloons of the old régime ruled in the prisons of the new one. Aristocratic distinctions were rigorously kept up. The nobles addressed one another by their respective titles: unless in the presence of the gaolers, when they took care to use the consecrated terms of citoyen and citoyenne. They formed circles, from which the roturiers, with whom they might the very next day ascend the guillotine, were sedulously excluded. All the formalities of good breeding were carefully preserved: gentlemen gave up their seats, of which there was a scarcity, to the ladies, and stood, entertaining them gallantly; polite invitations to dinner were sent from Corridor Frimaire to Corridor Floreal.

There was even no dearth of amusements in this strange

world. It was generally in the afternoon that the prisoners met; when the court-yards of the Luxembourg, of Saint-Lazare, and several other prisons, exhibited almost as much gaiety as the most fashionable places of Parisian resort. In the palace of the Luxembourg, then converted into a prison, the captives often assembled in an antechamber commanding a view of the fine gardens below, where there friends and relatives daily gathered to obtain a distant glimpse of those they loved. The severity of the sentinels generally deprived the prisoners of this consolation; but grief or care had little power over this light-hearted race. The scene in the antechamber was animated and gay: ladies brought their work, old nobles sat apart in earnest conversation, while the young walked up and down the room, or gathered into laughing groups. At one end of the gallery three chairs were disposed so as to represent a guillotine; this was a game invented by the ladies of the Luxembourg. Surrounded by a circle of spectators, who blamed or applauded them according to their success, they imitated faithfully the last moments of the condemned; and, like the Roman gladiators, thus studied how to die gracefully. A similar game was invented and followed by the Girondists in the Conciergerie.

These images of death seemed to enhance the brief pleasures of the captives: it was because they were to die that they would enjoy existence to the last. Never were the voluptuous precepts of Horace more faithfully obeyed: the mock guillotine threw no damp on the mirthful scene around. Appointments were made for music and card-parties in the evening, for lectures on astronomy, chemistry, and other sciences, to be delivered by captive savants, or for literary readings, epigrams, boutsrimés, and acted charades. The ladies dressed for these soirées as carefully as their reduced wardrobes allowed, the gentlemen were assiduous and polite; open flirtations were carried on, and sincere affections often sprang up in these dens of terror. Some of the ladies, who had formerly ruled the gay world, now swayed in a prison their light sceptre. Sad Madame de Condorcet, in widow's weeds, cared

little for her former power; but the witty and caustic Madame de Coigny, the foe of Cardinal de Brienne and Marie Antoinette, failed not to exercise her capricious rule in Saint-Lazare. Near her appeared her daughter, whose grace and loveliness inspired the poet André Chénier with a fervent passion, which he expressed in the exquisite verses entitled "La Jeune Captive." He perished the day before the fall of Robespierre; Mademoiselle de Coigny survived the Reign of Terror.

The deaths of those around them interfered little with the pleasures of the prisoners: they were not selfishly indifferent; they only knew that their own turn would soon come: that to be guillotined was the common fate. Without this seemingly reckless spirit, how could they have endured the hours of their captivity—for horrible it was in reality—beheld their friends and relatives daily torn from them to be led to death, and yet have lived on and betrayed no weakness? It was generally when the prisoners were assembled together, when the scene of gaiety was at its height, when projects were making for the morrow, and the love of a day was being indulged, that some drunken gaoler came to read the long list of victims. A deep, hushed silence immediately prevailed: it seemed as though, on the approach of this herald of death, the breathing of life had suddenly become suspended. As he slowly spelled over every name, those who were thus summoned to trial—and they knew that trial signified death—calmly bade their friends farewell, and came forward. Others immediately took their places in the game or conversation left unfinished by their departure. A few delayed in order to write, on the table where they had partaken of their last repast, some poetical adieu. The most beautiful and touching of these effusions is that which the poet Roucher, the beloved friend of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, addressed to his wife and children, on sending them his portrait drawn by a fellow-prisoner—

"Ne vous étonnez point, objets chéris et doux,
Si quelque air de tristesse obscurcit mon visage;

Lorsqu'une main savante dessina cette image,
L'échafaud m'attendait, et je songeais à vous."

The ignorance of the gaolers, the indifference, and often the generosity of the prisoners, led to constant mistakes of identity. A young man of twenty was guillotined "for having a son among the émigrés." The old dowager Duchess of Biron, and her daughter-in-law, the widow of the duke, formerly Count of Lauzun, and who has already been introduced in these pages as the Countess Amélie, perished instead of their steward. The two ladies were confined together in the Luxembourg; the gaoler received a list containing the name of Biron: "But there are two of them," said he to the gendarme waiting with the cart. "Then bring them both." The list had come at a later hour than usual; the old maréchale was at supper; she calmly concluded her meal whilst the other prisoners were preparing; when all was ready, she took up her book of devotion, and departed cheerfully, She was guillotined with her daughter-in-law the next day. A similar error gave the Countess of Maillé an opportunity of displaying her nobleness of mind. On hearing the name of Maillé called out by the gaoler, she stepped forth from the ranks of the prisoners, but observed, that though the surname which had been read was hers, the Christian name prefixed to it was not. She was asked to designate the person to whom it referred; silence was her only reply. On being pressed to say, at least, where that person—her sister-in-law—might be found, she answered, "I do not desire death, but I prefer it a thousand times to the shame of saving myself at the expense of another. I am ready to follow you." Struck with her magnanimity, the commissary who had come to fetch the prisoners away, spared her. This forbearance saved her life.

When gaolers, gendarmes, and prisoners, all were gone, when the rolling of the cart which bore the latter to death had subsided in the distance, the prisoners recovered from their momentary gravity. The light jest, the caustic repartee, the gay trifling were resumed, and the hum of conversation once more filled the hall, or the courtyard, whichever it might be.

Few regrets were given to the departed; those who had been spared to-day knew not whether their hour might not come on the morrow. After the introduction of the republican calendar, the tenth of every décade was consecrated to repose: no trials or executions took place on Décadi. When the prisoners, therefore, reached the day on which even the guillotine rested, they knew that they had at least twenty-four hours more to live. Years of life were never hailed with more joy than was this brief respite: throughout all the prisons of Paris, Décadi was kept as a day of festivity and gladness, as another resting-place between life and the scaffold.

At no epoch, during the whole of the eighteenth century, was female influence so clearly displayed, as at this period in the prisons, and over the aspect of prison life. The levity, the recklessness, the aim at effect, the heroism with which the prisoners met their fate, were not only distinctive attributes of the national character, but also traits strongly illustrating the influence which woman had ever exercised, and which she possessed over it still. This power was, as formerly, one of mingled good and evil: if it often led men to meet death with unbecoming levity, it also made them encounter it in a brave and undaunted mood. The peculiar heroism of woman—endurance—seemed imparted by her to all those near whom she came. This courage was at the same time theatrical and sincere. Women who asked Fouquier Tinville for death, provided themselves with rouge, in order not to look pale on the scaffold: this precaution was often adopted by prisoners of both sexes. Other ladies kept awake at night, lest, in case they were suddenly called to trial, they should betray any weakness. To suffer with true, calm courage was not enough: there was scorn of tricotteuses, and insulting Jacobins to brave, on the way to the guillotine; inquiring looks of fellow-prisoners to meet; a part to act before all.

This haughty levity was not, however, the only feature of female influence in the prisons. Many pure-minded women, who had kept themselves free from the corruption of the age, had found in holy knowledge truer lessons of death than those

to be derived from the game of the guillotine. Calm, resigned, affecting not more courage than their hearts could feel, they awed even professed sceptics into veneration. With words of gentle and eloquent persuasion, the widow of the Count of Clermont Tonnere subdued the proud spirit of the philosopher La Harpe. Convinced by her arguments and example, he became a fervent and sincere Christian; remaining so until his death, which did not occur until several years afterwards. The young and pious Countess of Noailles was generally called the angel of the prison. None of her fellow-captives could behold or approach her without emotion and respect. In her deep humility, she saw nothing of this. She was tried and condemned. Some one urged her to take some repose. "How can one sleep on the eve of eternity?" she replied. And she spent in vigil and prayer the last night of a life as pure as it had been brief. Whilst the worldly-minded gave themselves up to whatever dissipation their gloomy place of sojourn could afford, the piously-inclined assembled apart to pray. It was at four in the afternoon, the hour of the executions, that they met together to read the solemn prayers for the dying. In the course of the evening, they met again to pray for the souls of the dead, according to the ritual of the Catholic Church. Youths and maidens scarcely beyond childhood knelt there by the side of gray-headed old age, listening silently to the exhortation of the priest—some doomed captive like them—and who, whilst reminding them of those that were gone, failed not to bid them prepare for their own approaching fate. These religious rites, strictly forbidden to the free, were not interdicted by the gaolers to their captives. "We let him live," said Fouquier Tinville of the Abbé Emery, incarcerated in the Conciergerie, "because, by his gentleness and good advice, he checks more murmurs and more tumult in our prisons, than we could with the help of the gendarmes and the guillotine."

Thus, some with reckless levity, others with religious resignation, but all with courage, met their fate. The heroism of the women is universally acknowledged to have surpassed that

of the men. The levity to which we have alluded did not exclude the highest and most noble qualities. Of all the women who perished during the Reign of Terror, one only, Madame du Barry, knew not how to die courageously. She was safe in England, assisting the emigrated nobles, when she resolved to return to France, to possess herself of the treasures she had hidden at Luciennes; without which she could not continue her generous task. She came, was betrayed by her favourite negro Zamore, taken before the tribunal, and condemned. Horror-struck at her fate, she wept bitterly on going to the guillotine, and passionately entreated the people to save her. Heedless of the example and remonstrances of those who were going to die with her, she continued to wring her hands and to bewail her fate; she struggled with the executioner on reaching the scaffold, and filled the whole Place de la Revolution with agonising shrieks.

Would that many had died thus: would that the scaffold had not become a stage for victims to perish with courage so silent and so stern, that the crowd below saw not the horror of their fate. If tears and lamentations, like those of this weak woman, had come from the carts which daily rolled along the streets, bearing their load of victims: if shrieks and cries for mercy like hers had resounded from the scaffold, then the terror would have been known for what it was,—a butchery: then it would not, it could not, have endured so long. But there seemed to exist a secret struggle between the crowd and the condemned, as to who should be more relentless, and who more defying: beings most opposed in feeling and opinions, united all in the same instinctive and unbending contempt of death and their oppressors.

Nothing is more characteristic, in the aspect of the prisons of this period, than the rapid succession in which individuals of every rank of life, and every political creed, passed through them on their brief journey: all tending to the same bourne—the scaffold.

Two days after the execution of Madame Roland, Olympe de Gonges—a woman far inferior to her in character and

talent, but not without some political and literary notoriety—like her, left the Conciergerie for the guillotine. At the age of thirty-eight, when her beauty and the successes it had procured for her were both gone, Olympe de Gonges took the title of "woman of letters," and published several dramatic and political works. Seized with what may be called the revolutionary fever of the times, she covered the walls of Paris with *affiches* signed with her name. It is asserted, though the fact may well be doubted, that Olympe was so illiterate as not to know even how to read, and to be compelled to dictate her compositions to various secretaries. Her writings bear traces of a facility bordering on improvisation. Bursts of real eloquence are disfigured by evident want of taste, extravagance, and absurdity; but many of her reflections are just and sound, and shew both originality and power. She wrote on almost every subject; chiefly on the emancipation and political rights of women. Her views on the great events passing before her changed constantly. She violently opposed the king, and when he was brought to trial had the courage to propose to defend him: a task which fear had induced the celebrated counsel Target to decline. After the death of Louis XVI., Olympe de Gonges attached herself to the Girondists: the fall of this party exasperated her, and she attacked Marat, Robespierre, and the Jacobins, in the most daring manner. She was immediately arrested, and tried by the revolutionary tribunal. She defended herself with courage and dignity; but on hearing the verdict of the jury against her, her fortitude seemed to desert her, and she said, "My enemies shall not have the pleasure of seeing my blood shed: I am with child, and shall give a *citoyen* or *citoyenne* to the republic." This assertion was disbelieved at the time, and was ascertained to be false. On learning that her sentence would be carried into execution, Olympe recovered her firmness: "Children of the fatherland," said she, from the guillotine to the crowd below, "you will avenge my death."

Madame Roland and Olympe de Gonges were not solitary instances of women who perished, though noted for their at-

tachment to the revolutionary principles. The amiable Madame Laviolette had not only embraced with passionate ardour the doctrines of an era which she considered one of freedom and happiness for humanity, but she also devoted herself to the care of the soldiers wounded in defending the frontiers of France. Falsely accused—for what motive is not known—by her husband, she was brought before the tribunal of Paris, and soon condemned to death. She heard her sentence with feelings of relief: the bitter deceptions of her brief existence had rendered it odious to her. Calling one of the prisoners to her window, she said to him, on the evening of her condemnation: "Look at me; I am calm. Assure your friends that I shall die worthy of them."

Victims more touching than those of political opinion were frequently incarcerated for some generous deed or act of womanly love. When old General Custine appeared before the tribunal, a young and beautiful woman might be seen sitting at his feet, sustaining his courage, and, by her calm devotedness, softening even the judges of that tribunal of blood. This lady was Madame de Custine, daughter-in-law of the general; by whom she had often been harshly treated in the days of his prosperity. The threats of those who had resolved upon the death of the general, and who dreaded her influence, could not terrify her away. All her spare time was spent in visiting and soliciting the members of the tribunal, and of the committee of public safety. Her ardent zeal and presence of mind would have secured her father-in-law's acquittal, if it had then been possible for a man once accused not to be condemned. Madame de Custine was very nearly meeting the fate of Madame de Lamballe, on the spot where that unfortunate princess had perished. She had left the hall where the trial of her relative took place, and was descending alone the steps of La Force; a silent crowd, of menacing aspect, gradually closed around her; an exclamation, or even a token of fear, and she was lost: she bit her lips until the blood came, in order to prevent herself from turning pale. In her path was a hideous poissarde, with an infant in her arms: Madame

de Custine paused and admired it. The woman understood her: "Take it," said she, presenting the child; "you will give it back to me below." Madame de Custine obeyed, and, protected by that shield, descended the steps in safety: when she had reached the street, she returned the child to its mother, without daring to murmur thanks, which might have been dangerous to both.

The condemnation and death of her father-in-law were not the last trials of this devoted woman. Her husband was soon afterwards thrown into prison. Hopeless of an acquittal, she planned his escape. For the sum of thirty thousand francs in gold, and a pension of two thousand livres, a daughter of the gaoler, named Louise, was to let the prisoner escape. Their measures were all taken, when M. de Custine learned that Louise, by thus aiding him, would incur the penalty of death. From that moment nothing could induce him to accede to the proposed plan. His wife wept and entreated him in vain. Louise knelt at his feet, offering to give up the reward and follow him and Madame de Custine wherever they went; he remained inflexible, still preferring death to the shame of saving his life at the expense of another. Scarcely had Madame de Custine become a widow, when she was in her turn thrown into prison; but her beauty, her devotedness, and her misfortunes had given her a friend in one of the Jacobins who happened to be brought into contact with her. A mason named Jérome resolved to save her. He had free access to Fouquier Tinville's office. Every day for six months he failed not once to place her act of accusation the last on the list. He thus saved her life. After the fall of Robespierre, Jérome was compelled to hide, and Madame de Custine was set at liberty. She fell ill, and Jérome, who knew it, sent her servant money wherewith to support her mistress and her child. Events subsequently enabled Madame de Custine to favour the escape of her benefactor from the kingdom.

Such instances of generosity or kindness from the terrorists were by no means rare The author Bitanbé was treated with some leniency in his prison because one of the turnkeys, who

daily sent to the scaffold the prisoners he disliked, had read his tale of *Joseph*, which he said "made him weep." As the Reign of Terror progressed, even the men by whom it had been established began to look upon their work with dread and horror. The executions daily assumed a more revolting character. Fourteen young girls, the eldest of whom was not eighteen years of age, were sent to the scaffold at once. Their crime was having assisted at a ball given by their parents, the chief inhabitants of the town, when Verdun surrendered to the Prussians. For this the tribunal of Paris condemned them to die. They were incarcerated in the Conciergerie, where their youth and modest beauty interested all the other prisoners in their favour. The manner in which they spent the last day of their life confirms a remark applicable to the whole female sex; who, during the Reign of Terror, thought far less of their fate than of the means by which it might be met with decency. Guided by this "ruling passion strong in death," the maidens of Verdun, on the eve of their execution, calmly prepared their garments for the morrow, so that they might be spared a blush even on the scaffold. They were conveyed all in one cart to the guillotine. A murmur of pity arose in the crowd as they passed through it, modest and beautiful in their white garments, as if attired for a festival. They died with a serenity more touching than the sternest courage. The execution of these innocent victims created a deep feeling of horror in the prison they had left. "On the day which followed their death," observes the prisoner Riouffe, "the court of the women looked like a garden which a storm has bereft of its fairest flowers."

To a woman, pure, beautiful, and courageous, belongs the honour of the first protest raised against this infamous tyranny. The handsome and eloquent Lucile Duplessis poured into the soul of her husband, Camille Desmoulins, the fervent sympathy with the oppressed, and the hatred of their tyrants, which burned in her own. It was to the wife whom he so tenderly loved that Camille owed death, and a fame more pure than he had yet won. Guilty of having, in the eloquent pages

of the *Vieux Cordelier*, proposed the substitution of a tribunal of clemency for one of blood, he was sent to the Luxembourg, to share the fate of those he had wished to save. On entering his prison, he exclaimed, with a sigh, "I die for having shed a few tears over the unhappy." During his brief captivity, he thought of nothing save Lucile and their child. He spent his days in writing her the most touching letters—which still exist, with the traces of his tears—and in watching her in the gardens below. After his condemnation it was still of her fate that he thought: happy, even in his misery, not to suspect what that fate would be. He died clasping a lock of her hair, and uttering the name of Lucile. His blood still stained the revolutionary scaffold, when the prisoners whom he had left in the Conciergerie beheld his widow appear amongst them. Pale and drooping, but still surpassingly beautiful even in her agonising sorrow, she looked like one bowed down by an overwhelming calamity, and to whom the grave alone could yield repose. The prisoners gazed on her as she wandered over the prison with her unsettled looks, or sat apart sad and desolate, and they felt that for her at least it would be well to die. Gentle to the last, notwithstanding the bitterness of her grief, she endeared herself to all. She shunned no one, but avoided consolation. She consorted chiefly with a young nun, who, on the opening of the revolution, had left her convent and married Hébert, the infamous author of the "Père Duchesne." Before he perished himself, Camille Desmoulins had by his sarcasms ruined Hébert, and brought him to the scaffold.

The widows of the two foes now met in the court-yard of the prison, and, sitting down on the same stone, wept together over their misfortunes. The widow of Hébert foresaw her fate, but thought that Lucile Desmoulins, so innocent and so pure, could not be condemned. "You are happy," she often said to her; "there is nothing against you: you will be acquitted." Lucile knew this was impossible: "They will kill me as they have killed him," was her answer; "let them: I know the blood of woman has never been shed in vain."

She heard her condemnation with serenity, and, like most of the victims of that disastrous period, attired herself in white to go to the scaffold. She preserved a cheerful bearing, conversing with her companions, and particularly with the widow of Hébert, as she went along. Her courage and her youthful beauty filled all those who gazed on her with admiration and sorrow. "How beautiful she looks! what a pity!" were the exclamations which arose upon her path. At the foot of the scaffold she tenderly embraced the widow of Hébert, bade her other companions farewell, and submitted to her fate with meek resignation. A beautiful, touching victim of woman's holiest feelings—compassion and love.

The efforts Camille Desmoulins had made to stay the course of the Reign of Terror seemed only to accelerate its progress. Whole generations were swept away at once. The virtuous Malesherbes, then more than eighty years of age, the courageous defender of Louis XVI., the humane minister whose first act of power had been to deliver prisoners unjustly detained, was cast into prison, with his sister, his daughter, his son-in-law, his grand-daughter and her husband, M. de Chateaubriand, brother of the late celebrated author. The cheerful serenity of Malesherbes, and the devotedness of Madame de Rosambeau, his daughter, excited the admiration of all the prisoners in the Conciergerie, where this family were confined. Madame de Rosambeau seemed to have forgotten every earthly object save her aged father. As the family proceeded, with other prisoners, to the tribunal, they met M. de Sombreuil—who had been reincarcerated—leaning on the arm of his daughter. The first time this heroic girl had appeared before the other prisoners, every look became fixed upon her and filled with tears. On beholding her now, Madame de Rosambeau observed—"You have had the glory of saving your father; I shall have the consolation of dying with mine."

Amongst those who shared the fate of the Malesherbes family, were two celebrated political antagonists, Chapelier and D'Esprénuil, and two ladies of the old noblesse, the

Duchess of Grammont, sister of the minister Choiseul, and Madame du Chatelet, widow of the celebrated Madame du Chatelet's only son, who had been guillotined a few months before. When these two ladies appeared before the revolutionary tribunal, the haughty Madame de Grammont behaved with great firmness and courage. She was accused of having sent money and linen to the queen after the 10th of August; she disdained to deny this honourable circumstance: "I will not purchase my life at the cost of an untruth," was her only justification. Madame du Chatelet, a calm, gentle woman, sought not to make any defence, but awaited her fate in silent submission. Reckless of herself, Madame de Grammont thought only of her friend. "That you should seek *my* death," she passionately exclaimed, addressing her judges, "since I despise and hate you—since I would have roused all Europe against you, if I could—that you should send me to the scaffold, is only natural. But what did this angel," she added, pointing to her friend, "ever do to you?—she, who always bore everything without complaint, and whose whole existence has been marked by actions of kindness and humanity?" This courageous appeal proved vain; but it was not thrown away on the memory of Madame de Grammont: that "Amazonian, fierce, haughty dame,"* over whose character this one little trait shed a noble and generous light. On the 22d of April 1794, Malesherbes, his family, the Duchess of Grammont, Madame du Chatelet, and several other individuals, fourteen in all, were conveyed in two carts to the place of execution. Madame de Rosambeau supported her father, near whom she was seated: she embraced him frequently, and, heedless of her own approaching end, wept over his fate. When the executioner parted them on the scaffold, she passionately exclaimed, "Wretch! would you murder my father?"

A few days after this barbarous execution, the Princess Elizabeth appeared before the revolutionary tribunal, and closed the list of royal victims. The almost unearthly serenity

* Walpole.

of her mind through every sorrow, her heavenly piety and calm loveliness, could not soften the tyrants of France. Free from ambition, from intrigue and weakness, she was stainless, even in the eyes of those who pronounced her condemnation. On the night of the 9th of May she was separated from her niece, and scarcely allowed time to bid her farewell. Her trial began at an early hour on the 10th. Twenty-four persons were tried with her; amongst them was the whole family of Brienne: with the exception of the cardinal, who committed suicide on being arrested. Madame de Montmorin and her son, and several courtiers and ladies of the aristocracy, were included in the act of accusation against Madame Elizabeth. "She need not complain," observed Fouquier Tinville, alluding to this circumstance; "surrounded by this faithful old noblesse she can, even at the foot of the guillotine, still fancy herself at Versailles." Madame Elizabeth answered her accusers with the calm dignity of her character. The aspect of death seemed to have made her resume the pride of rank, which she had always discarded in life. On being asked her name, she replied, "Elizabeth of France, sister of Louis XVI., and aunt of Louis XVII., your king." The judge called Louis XVI. a tyrant. An indignant flush overspread the features of the gentle princess. "If my brother had been a tyrant," she replied, "you would not be here; nor should I be judged by you to-day." She heard her sentence without emotion, and serenely prepared herself for death. One of the young women condemned with her not being provided with a suitable covering for her bosom, Madame Elizabeth tore her own fichu in two, and gave her half. Such was the universal veneration she inspired, that when her hair was cut off, the persons condemned with her, and even the executioners, took and shared it with one another, like some precious relic.

Amongst those who accompanied the princess to the scaffold was the Marchioness Crussol d'Usez d'Amboise; a weak, timorous woman, who could never sleep unless two waiting-women were in the same room with her, and whom

the sight of a mouse or a spider threw into agonies of fear. But the aspect of death, instead of terrifying this frivolous being, made her display a singular amount of firmness and courage. In the cart which led her to execution, she only thought of testifying to the princess her respect and attachment.

Madame Elizabeth, touched by this attention in such a moment, expressed to her the regret she felt at not being able to shew her sense of her kindness. "If your royal highness would condescend to kiss me," said the marchioness, "I should think myself most happy." "Very willingly, marquise," replied Madame Elizabeth, and she embraced not only her but all the condemned ladies, as they passed her one by one before ascending the scaffold. Her turn did not come until twenty-four heads had fallen beneath the knife; the executioner then approached her, and, as her hands were bound, removed the handkerchief which covered her bosom. A deep blush suffused the features of the modest princess: "In the name of your mother!" she said, with much emotion, "cover me." The man silently obeyed, and, without further remonstrance, she ascended the ladder, and submitted to her fate.

Of all the victims of the revolution, Madame Elizabeth was one of the most guiltless: her sole crime was the royal blood which flowed in her veins, and the devoted attachment she had ever felt for her unhappy brother.

As the Reign of Terror drew to a close, it assumed a more gloomy and fearful character. The law of the 22d of Prairial denied defenders to the accused, and authorised the jury to convict without evidence; the prisoners were treated with increased rigour: kind-hearted turnkeys were supplanted by men who had served as *égorgeurs* in the provinces; captives were transferred from one prison to another, in order to break whatever social ties they might have formed; they were no longer allowed to procure their own food, but were reduced to one wretched meal in the twenty-four hours. This repast, taken in common, was called the *gamelle*. Even the mode in which they were summoned to death invested their fate with new terrors.

The sight of so many victims daily conveyed from the various prisons of Paris to that last fatal one—the Conciergerie—at length raised pity in the hearts of the people. To avoid this, the hour of removal was changed. The trampling of horses, and the heavy rolling wheels of the long, covered carts, destined to convey them away, now roused the prisoners at dead of night. They awoke with a start, and listened with beating hearts to the harsh voices of the turnkeys, angrily resounding through every gallery and corridor, as they summoned the devoted ones to rise for their last journey. Husbands were thus torn from their wives, mothers from their children, without the indulgence of a last farewell. A hundred and sixty-nine prisoners were taken away in one night from the Luxembourg alone. It was not until the mournful procession had left, until the gloomy prison had once more relapsed into silence, that the surviving prisoners felt, with a sigh of relief, they had yet another day to live.

The introduction of spies amongst them completed the misery of the prisoners. An unsuccessful attempt which Lucile Desmoulins had made to effect the liberation of her husband was taken as the proof of a vast conspiracy existing against the republic in all the prisons. Informers, technically called moutons, were commissioned to detect this supposed plot, and make up lists of victims. Whenever Fouquier Tinville wanted what he termed a "new batch," a conspiracy was invented. The presence of these spies, who were soon known by their insolence, checked that freedom of intercourse the prisoners had hitherto enjoyed. Amusements were abandoned; all gaiety was gone; the prisoners walked about their abode with careworn aspect and looks of silent horror. They anxiously waited for the papers, to read with avidity, not the news for which the busy world might care,—with these they had done,—but the long daily list of the guillotined. Their fate when they were transferred to the Conciergerie for condemnation was more gloomy still. They were there herded in infectious dungeons, still stained with the blood shed in the massacres of September, and built around the wide court-yard; a portion

of which had remained unpaved since the stones were taken up for the murdered dead to be buried on the spot where they had fallen. Towards three in the afternoon, the long procession of the condemned descended from the tribunal, and passed, with a firm step and sedate bearing, beneath a long gloomy vault, on either side of which stood rows of their fellow-prisoners, watching them with eager and morbid interest. Thirty-five members of the parliament of Paris, thirty-two farmers-general, and twenty-five merchants of Sedan, passed beneath that vault on their way to the scaffold. Seventy victims were sent to death at once, under the pretence that they were all implicated in the imaginary conspiracy of Cécile Renaud. This young girl called one morning on Robespierre, and asked to see him; his landlady thought her manner suspicious; she caused her to be arrested, and a small knife was found in the basket she carried on her arm: she said that her object in asking to see Robespierre "was to see the shape of a tyrant." The knife found on her, and this reply, were taken as proofs of her design to assassinate the Dictator. Her parents, her brothers, old M. de Sombreuil, the family of Sainte Amaranthe, and other individuals, sixty-nine in all, were involved in her ruin. Madame de Sainte Amaranthe was a witty and beautiful royalist lady, whose daughter, more beautiful still, married M. de Sartines. They had passed safely through the worst part of the Reign of Terror, gathering around them whatever was left of the once brilliant Parisian world of fashion. The advice of a friend, and their own inclination, led them to court the intimacy of Robespierre, and to become initiated in the mystic sect of Catherine Théos; which, from his manifest leaning towards religious principles, he was supposed to favour.

Catherine Théos, "the mother of God," as she called herself, was a fanatic old woman, who, assisted by Dom Gerle, a monk of the Chartreuse, attempted to found a sect, and foretold the advent of a new Messiah. These visionaries and their disciples entertained the most profound respect for Robespierre.

The committee of public safety had beheld with disgust the

fête which Robespierre instituted in honour of the Supreme Being. The extravagant doctrines and strange ceremonies of Catherine Théos gave them an opportunity of covering him with ridicule. The old fanatic and her disciples were accordingly incarcerated, as accomplices of Cécile Renaud, whom they had never seen. Robespierre, who had displayed towards Madame de Sainte Amaranthe and her daughter a courteous admiration, verging on friendship, protested, but in vain, against their arrest. They endured their fate with courage and resignation. One day Madame de Sainte Amaranthe learned, falsely as it afterwards appeared, that M. de Sartines had been executed: going up to her daughter, she said, "Your husband is no more; we shall probably follow him to-morrow to the scaffold: no tears,—this is no time for softness,—we must prepare to meet with courage an inevitable fate." A day passed, and they were not summoned to the tribunal. At eleven o'clock on the following night, an usher entered her room, and told her she was wanted below. "And are we not wanted too?" anxiously asked her son and daughter. "Certainly," was the reply. They threw themselves into the arms of their mother, exclaiming, in a transport of joy, "Then, we shall all die together."

They appeared before the tribunal on the following day. There they saw M. de Sartines, who still lived; Cécile Renaud and her family; and M. de Sombreuil, saved in vain by his heroic daughter: old Catherine Théos had died in her prison. After a mock trial, the seventy victims were condemned. They were lead to death in the red chemise of murderers. This garment, intended to disfigure the young and lovely women thus barbarously immolated, seemed, as in the case of Charlotte Corday, to heighten their beauty. Exasperated at the courage with which they met their fate, Fouquier Tinville is said to have conceived the infamous project of causing future victims to be bled, and consequently weakened before execution. This idea was never carried into effect. Shortly after this fearful execution, sixteen nuns of Compiègne were guillotined for belonging to the sect of Catherine Théos, whom they had

never even had an opportunity of seeing. A kind subterfuge of the municipal authorities of Compiègne had led them to sign, unconsciously, their adherence to the constitutional oath. On learning this, the nuns wrote and signed a solemn retractation of what they considered a virtual apostasy. They were imprisoned, transferred to Paris, and placed in the Conciergerie for trial. At the bar of the tribunal their superior generously endeavoured to save her sisters by taking on herself the sole responsibility of their acts; but both the nuns and the judges exclaimed against this course. The victims heard their condemnation with serenity and joy. On the preceding day one of them, Mademoiselle de Crosy, had composed a parody of the Marseillaise, in five verses, of which this is the first :—

"Livrons nos cœurs à l'allégresse,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé–
Loin de nous la moindre faiblesse!
Le glaive sanglant est levé,
Préparons nous à la victoire;
Sous les drapeaux d'un Dieu mourant,
Que chacun marche en conquérant;
Courons tous volons à la gloire :
Ranimons notre ardeur—
Nos corps sont au Seigneur!
Montons,
Montons à l'échafaud, et Dieu sera vainqueur."

They were sent to the scaffold on the morning of the 17th of July. In the cart where they sat together they repeated the prayers for the dying, and sang the *Te Deum Laudamus*, heard only in the solemn festivals of the Church. The long white robes and veils of their order, their calm bearing and sacred hymns, their years, varying from blooming youth to gray old age, their resignation and innocence, created a deep feeling of compassion in the crowd. No cries, no hootings rose upon their path : a silence deep and mournful accompanied them to the guillotine. At the foot of the scaffold the nuns all repeated, in a loud clear tone, the vows for which they were going to die. They then began the hymn to the Holy Ghost—*Veni, Creator.* Their superior had asked to die last, and the nuns passed before her as they ascended the

ladder, still singing the solemn strain; which was diminished, but not interrupted, with every fall of the knife. When fifteen heads were low, the aged superior delivered herself over to the executioner, and perished with the words of praise and joy still on her lips.

Eight nuns confined in Port-Royal gave up life in the same heroic spirit. They were accused of having, in spite of the prohibitions to the contrary, continued to lead a conventual life. "If your laws," they replied, "forbid solitude, friendship, prayer, and deeds of charity, we confess that we have broken them." The president called them fanatics. "Fanatics," they answered, "are those that kill. We pray for our enemies." The president at first only threatened them with deportation, and asked them where they would like to go. They said that they knew no country so unhappy as France, none which so much needed their prayers, and all the consolation it was in their power to give. "When people stay here, it is to die," he significantly replied. "Then let us die," was their unmoved answer. The interrogatory, always a mere matter of form, speedily concluded with their condemnation and death.

Such instances of calm heroism, however admirable they might be, had ceased to astonish. The mere endurance of death was nothing: so great had the disregard of life become, that many women cried out "Vive le Roi!" merely to be sent to the guillotine. They found death preferable to the torture of living in a land daily stained with the crimes of the evil and the blood of the just. The Polish Princess of Lubomirska, the friend of the Girondists, seized with horror at the scenes she witnessed in her prison, wrote to Fouquier Tinville to ask for death. It is needless to say the request was speedily granted. If fortitude in the last hours of life be a claim to fame, the sages and heroes who immortalised the past might well have envied the deaths of the most humble victims who perished then. Composed and serene amidst the hootings of the crowd, they seemed to repudiate life as unworthy of them; and, whilst yet standing on the threshold of erring humanity,

they already appeared environed with the calm sanctity of death.

Traits of touching and sublime devotedness, of superhuman courage inspired by love, illustrate the history of woman in the prisons of the terror. Many women, like the attendant of Madame de Narbonne, asked to perish with the mistresses whose captivity they had willingly shared. Many, when they appeared before the tribunal, forgot their own fate in that of some beloved friend. Reckless of herself, the Marchioness of Armentières defended and justified her friend the Princess of Chimay, with courageous though unavailing eloquence. Never was conjugal affection more touchingly displayed than at the close of that age of immorality. The ex-minister Clavière, implicated in the ruin of the Girondists, committed suicide in the Conciergerie. His wife, on learning his fate, swallowed a slow poison, settled her affairs, and parted from her children, with a composure and resolve which the prayers and lamentations of those around her could not disturb. "I am going to join him," was her sole thought: a thought which changed into joy the bitterness of death. The young and beautiful Madame de Lavergne, holding her child in her arms, accompanied her aged and infirm husband to the tribunal, in the vain hope of softening the judges. On hearing him condemned, she rose from her seat, and cried out, "Vive le Roi!" This was death, and she knew it well. The feelings of the wife prevailed, for a moment only, over those of the mother. "Is there a mother here," she asked, turning round, "who will take care of my poor child?" "I will," replied a woman of the people. She stepped forward and took the child from its mother's arms. Madame de Lavergne, condemned without trial, was sent to the scaffold with her husband. Frequent executions had not, at that time, blunted the sensibilities of the crowd, and many voices cried out on her passage, "Why is this? She has not deserved death!" "Friends, it was my fault," answered Madame de Lavergne from the cart; "I would die with my husband." Mademoiselle Gattey, on hearing her brother condemned also cried out, "Vive le Roi!" in order to

be sent to death with him; but the judges, unwilling to gratify her, did not pronounce her condemnation until the following day.

When old Marshal de Mouchy was apprehended, his wife calmly said, "Since my husband is arrested, I am arrested also." He was soon summoned before the tribunal. "Madame," said he to her, "it is the will of God; you are a Christian woman, I need say no more." She persisted in accompanying him. "If her husband must appear," she observed, "then she must appear likewise." The aged pair stood together at the bar; the marshal alone was condemned. But when the public accuser made her remark this, Madame de Mouchy replied in an unmoved tone, "Since my husband is condemned, then I am condemned also," and she entered the cart, and ascended the scaffold with him; faithful even unto death.

The young and handsome Madame de Bois-Bérenger had courageously remained in France, whilst her husband emigrated. She hoped, by not leaving the country, to preserve her property to her family. She lived in great retirement, and remained for a long time ignorant of M. de Bérenger's fate. Orders were at length issued for her apprehension. The gendarmes who came to arrest her produced their warrant, authorising them to seize on the person of "femme De Bois-Bérenger, widow of De Bois-Bérenger, executed for conspiracy." Seized with sudden horror, the unhappy woman sank down in a swoon at their feet. When she recovered, it was to utter a passionate protest of royalism. She was taken to the Conciergerie, where she found her father, M. de Malessy, her mother and her sister. The piety, resigned sweetness of temper, and beauty of these two amiable sisters, made one of their fellow-prisoners compare them to "angels ready to wing their flight for heaven." Madame de Bérenger became the nurse of all the sick women in the Conciergerie. Her father fell ill, and partly owed his recovery to her devoted care. Her chief task was, however, to sustain Madame de Malessy's drooping courage. The unhappy woman looked on her two daughters with mute, despairing glances: a terror, which was

not for her own fate, seemed to have taken exclusive possession of her soul. It was Madame de Bérenger who watched over her with maternal solicitude, who deprived herself of food in order that she might not want, and who surrounded her with that tenderness of love which the devoted mother bestows upon her child. The whole family were summoned to the tribunal on the same day. Madame de Bérenger was not at first included in the act of accusation; she wrung her hands and wept bitterly at the prospect of life. When her own act of accusation came, she received it with transports of joy. M. de Malessy calmly heard the sentence which sent them to death. Mademoiselle de Malessy, turning towards him, ingenuously observed: "My kind father, I shall keep so close to you, who are so honest and so good, that for your sake God will receive me, notwithstanding all my sins." Madame de Malessy burst into tears. "Be of good cheer," said Madame de Bérenger, embracing her; "we shall all die together. You need have no regret: your family accompanies you, and your virtues will soon be rewarded in the sojourn of innocence and peace." As she returned with her mother, whom she was tenderly supporting, from the tribunal, Madame de Bérenger perceived, in the gallery where other prisoners awaited the moment of appearing before the judges, an old man who wept bitterly. "What!" said she, going up to him, "your are a man, and you weep!" Shamed by her arguments, and her serenity, he promised to accept death in a more becoming spirit. On reaching the room where the *toilette* of the condemned took place, Madame de Bérenger cut off the hair of her parents and that of her sister, and then requested them to perform the same last office for her. She supported and consoled her mother to the last. "Be of good cheer," she repeated; "we all die together."

Another lady named Madame Malessy equally distinguished herself by her filial piety. Her mother, Madame de Lachabeaussière, was imprisoned in Saint-Lazare for having concealed a proscribed man. Madame Malessy was then a captive in one of the provincial prisons. Notwithstanding

her advanced stage of pregnancy, she immediately asked to be transferred to Paris. The request was granted. But when, after a long journey, the devoted daughter reached Saint-Lazare, she found that she could not see her mother, who had been placed in secret confinement. Despair affected her reason. She sat for hours on the floor near the spot where Madame Lachabeaussière was confined, repeating unceasingly, "My mother; my unhappy mother!" Notwithstanding her insanity, she neglected no means of adding to her mother's comfort. The meals of prisoners in secret confinement were often forgotten by the gaolers, she accordingly deprived herself of her own food, in order to have it conveyed to Madame de Lachabeaussière; and from this task of filial love the threats, refusals, and insults of the gaolers, could never deter her. These two interesting women survived the Reign of Terror, and Madame Malessy subsequently recovered her reason.

Love found not less devoted martyrs than filial or conjugal affection. M. Boyer and Madame C. conceived a passionate attachment for one another in the Conciergerie. Boyer was one day called before the tribunal; every look became riveted on his mistress; she seemed calm, and merely went up to her room to write a letter. A friend intercepted the missive; it was addressed to Fouquier Tinville, and contained a fervent confession of royalism. Not receiving any reply to this letter, she wrote another. "I know all," said she to the friends who concealed the papers from her. Seeing her courage, they revealed the truth to her. M. Boyer had been tried and executed. The whole of that day and the following night she spent in her cell weeping alone, and reading over the letters she had formerly received from her lover. When morning came, she placed them near her heart, and attired herself with great elegance. She was at breakfast with the other prisoners, when the bell which announced the approach of the commissaries, who daily read the lists of death, rang loudly. "They are coming for me," she joyfully exclaimed. "Farewell, my friends! Oh! I am so happy!" She cut off her

hair, divided it amongst the prisoners, gave a few articles of jewelry to the women present, and proceeded to the tribunal with a light and happy step. When Fouquier Tinville asked her if she were the author of the letter he had received: "Yes, monster!" she passionately replied. On reaching the scaffold, she merely exclaimed, "It is here that he perished," and joyously delivered herself over to the executioner.

The beautiful Princess of Monaco, the friend of Madame Necker and of the Countess Amélie, was one of the last victims of this reign of blood. When the agents of the terrorists came to arrest her, she succeeded in effecting her escape, and in finding a refuge in the house of a friend; but the dread of compromising her generous hostess induced her to leave this asylum. She was soon recaptured and thrown into prison. On being condemned by the tribunal she declared herself pregnant, in order to prolong her life; a subterfuge often resorted to by women similarly circumstanced. On the following day, however, she blushed at the untruth she had told, and wrote to Fouquier Tinville to disavow it. She prepared for death with great calmness, cut her hair off with a piece of broken glass, and asked her femme de chambre for some rouge, "in order," as she said, "that if she should turn pale no one might see it." As the princess passed in the court of the prison, she said to the prisoners whom she saw there, "I go to death with the calmness of innocence, and wish you, from my soul, a better fate." She delivered a packet containing her hair to one of the turnkeys, beseeching him, in the most earnest manner, to deliver it to her children. One of the women condemned to die with her betrayed the greatest grief. The princess spent her last moments in endeavouring to console her. "Take courage, my dear friend," said she to her, "it is the guilty alone who ought to fear." She perished on the 8th of Thermidor. On the 9th, the Reign of Terror ceased.

For some time previously to this memorable event, a considerable degree of fear and anxiety had pervaded the prisons of Paris. The eleven thousand prisoners considered their fate

as inevitable. Every day new victims were snatched from their ranks; every day they heard in the streets the long lists of the guillotined. The life they led was so thoroughly wretched that they learned to look upon its close as a blessing. It was not, therefore, death itself they feared, but the manner in which death might come. Sinister words had been uttered by the terrorists. "We must have an end," said one. "The prisons must be cleared," observed Henriot, in the court of the Luxembourg. From prison to prison there spread a rumour that the massacres of September were soon to be renewed. The prisoners had become reconciled to the guillotine; but the idea of the death struggle between them and their murderers filled them with unconquerable horror. They were no longer allowed to see the papers; they knew nothing therefore of the secret quarrel between Robespierre and the committees he had governed so long. On the morning of the 9th, the tocsin began to ring; the gaolers looked dark and threatening, and took away all knives and instruments of defence from their prisoners. Thus had the massacres of September begun. Confident that they were going to perish, the prisoners resigned themselves to their fate. During the whole of the day the drum continued to beat, and the tocsin to toll. These sounds seemed more terrific still in the hushed silence of the prisons. The women had gathered together to kneel in fervent prayer; priests gave their last benediction to their companions, and, as a warning of their approaching fate, prisoners repeated to one another: "Friends, we are now all ninety years old." At five in the afternoon the tumult in the streets and the terror of the prisoners reached their height. That some terrific struggle was then going on, and that the result of that struggle would be life or death for them, they knew. The decree against Robespierre, Couthon, and Saint-Just, was shouted in the streets; the distant signs of their relatives and friends filled the captives with astonishment and uncertainty. Was this but a change of tyrants, or were they to hope indeed?

At length missives and papers from without, purchased

from the gaolers at their weight in gold, told the whole truth. Robespierre had fallen! the Reign of Terror had ceased! A delirious joy seized on the prisoners. They wept convulsively, and embraced one another with transport; they mourned for the dead; they returned thanks to God. A deliverance so unexpected, so miraculous, seemed incredible. But yesterday they were doomed; to-day they were saved. They eagerly asked for details. How, through whom had this been done? Many rumours were afloat—one prevailed over the rest, "A woman," they were told, "a defenceless prisoner like themselves, but strong in the indomitable courage of a generous heart, had from her dungeon overthrown the tyrant." If there was exaggeration in this rumour, there was also much truth: the surpassing beauty and the heroism of Theresa Cabarrus mainly contributed to the fall of Robespierre. He fell; and with him passed away, not merely the Reign of Terror, but also the dream of republican freedom and greatness which France had indulged in at the cost of so many guiltless lives.

CHAPTER X.

THERESA CABARRUS—FALL OF ROBESPIERRE—REACTION—PAST AND ACTUAL STATE OF SOCIETY—MADAME DE STAEL—CLOSE.

In almost all the conspiracies on record, a woman will be found to have acted a conspicuous part; either as the victim of wrongs which the conspirators sought to avenge, or as the presiding spirit from whom they derived their inspiration. Women do not always stand on the side of democracy, or of popular movements: they are essentially conservative, because conservatism is the strength and safety of their homes; but they also abhor tyrants and tyranny: less from reasoning or conviction, than from a fervent sympathy with the wronged and the oppressed.

Such women as Madame Roland, who love freedom simply for its own sake, and are ready to suffer and die for a political principle, are very rarely met with: for one like her, there are a hundred like Lucile Desmoulins; courageous and pitying women, whose political principles are written in their hearts, and who would rather perish with those they love than behold cruelty in cowardly silence. It is this feeling of compassion, innate in woman's nature, that will ever render her dangerous to tyrants and arbitrary power. She cannot, if she would, remain unmoved. She cannot suppress the indignant and passionate eloquence with which pity so seldom fails to inspire her: an eloquence not the less deep for being native and untaught.

It was, perhaps, the active compassion thus manifested by women during the Reign of Terror that rendered the oppressors so relentless towards the whole of their sex; as if they felt instinctively that the beings whose hearts were ever open



Madame Tallien.

sponsibility of the deeds of September, and of every revolutionary excess. He no sooner beheld the lovely Donna Theresa than he became passionately enamoured. He was young, handsome, and all-powerful: Madame de Fontenay was frail enough to accept his homage. Her husband was liberated, and favoured in his retreat to Spain. Theresa remained behind, procured a divorce, and when the space of time exacted by the French law had elapsed married Tallien. This latter event did not, however, take place until after the 9th of Thermidor. In the meantime, the beautiful Spaniard reigned with her lover over Bordeaux. Attired in a Grecian costume, which enhanced her wonderful beauty, she everywhere appeared in public with Tallien, carelessly leaning on his shoulder, in the attitude then given by sculptors and painters to the goddess of liberty.

The mistress of the proconsul seemed anxious to efface, by the use she made of her power, the source from which it camé. Generous and compassionate by nature, she beheld with horror the reign of the guillotine. Yielding to her gentle influence, Tallien became less cruel and relentless. Every day his beautiful mistress snatched new victims from the scaffold. From the moment that Madame de Fontenay possessed any influence in Bordeaux, few perished, with the exception of the Girondists, whom Tallien did not dare to spare. There was scarcely a family in the city but owed her the life of one of its members. When executions which he would not or could not forbid were to take place, Tallien carefully concealed all knowledge of them from his siren and pitying mistress. He knew her power and his own weakness too well not to fear yielding to her tears and gentle entreaties. A power which was never used but for acts of charity and goodness was not likely to be very severely stigmatised, even by the most rigid. In the town which her lover ruled, and where, in appearance at least, the terror was to reign, Theresa Cabarrus soon received the gentle and significant name of "Our Lady of Mercy!"

The leniency of Tallien was known and condemned at Paris. He was recalled from his mission, and Theresa, who now took

his name, was thrown into the prison of the Carmes, where so many priests had been massacred in September. Her lover could not succeed in procuring her liberation: she who had freed so many captives, and saved so many victims, now pined a prisoner in her turn, threatened with the axe and the scaffold.

In her prison Madame Tallien met the pious and resigned Madame de Custine, the handsome and royalist Duchess of Aiguillon, and the lovely creole, Josephine de Beauharnais, the future empress of France: she shared the apartment of the two last-mentioned ladies. There was but one room and one bed for three women of such different characters and destinies. Their names may still be found written side by side on the walls of their cell, and appear there with large red stains of blood left in September 1792. Madame Tallien and the Duchess of Aiguillon were, in courage at least, kindred spirits; but the weak and credulous Josephine wept unceasingly, and spent the greatest portion of her time in privately seeking, through the aid of a pack of cards, revelations of the future. This was the period of alarm in the prisons, when rumours of a new September were rife, and terrorists were heard to regret the insufficiency of their spies, and to dwell on the necessity of "inoculating" the prisons. The prospect of perishing in a midnight massacre excited more indignation than fear in the heroic soul of Madame Tallien. She felt herself reserved for a higher destiny: she longed to break at once the chain which held her captive, and bound all France in its iron links. The daring and generous thought of overthrowing a tyrannic power, was one well likely to seduce a spirit that loved to dwell on all that was great and striking in the eyes of mankind. From her prison she energetically urged Tallien to save her—to widen the breach between Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety, and to deliver France from the Reign of Terror. Tallien scarcely needed her words to urge him on to prompt and decisive action. He was fully conscious of Theresa's danger and of his own; for he belonged to the class of men so much hated by the puritanic Robespierre, as having brought into the new

régime all the corruption and profligacy of the old aristocracy.

The causes which produced the 9th of Thermidor are now well known: it was a division among the tyrants, not a reaction in favour of humanity. Those who overthrew Robespierre were the most relentless of the terrorists: they never once intended to check the Reign of Terror itself. This thought may have entered the generous heart of Madame Tallien: her lover thought only of the danger she ran, and of his own head, then much in peril. The considerations which induced his associates to act were fully as selfish.

Robespierre has been, and will ever be, most diversely judged. He was certainly a man of strong principle, inflexible, severe, and self-denying: in many respects the Calvin of the French revolution, applying to this world stern dogmas, such as the Genevese reformer dealt out for the next. If the regeneration of France from the sink of immorality into which she had fallen was only to be had at the cost of human life, Robespierre was willing to pay the price. A deistic democracy was the ideal of his existence: he was neither cruel nor immoral; but he was cold, insensible, almost passionless, and a political pedant. For the same reason he was uncompromising, relentless, and almost inaccessible to the pity that far more guilty men could feel. Their motives were hatred, thirst for blood, or revenge; his were centred in the triumph of his system: let that prevail, and he would not ask for one drop of blood. It is difficult to judge such characters fairly. They are too often viewed as remorseless tyrants, or as high-minded men. Those who saw only his actions abhorred him; those who read his motives idolised Robespierre. Both were wrong. No man deserves praise whose deeds and words fail to agree; no man should be blamed unconditionally when it can be said of him that his motives are earnest and high. Robespierre was, perhaps, the most in earnest of the political men of his time. He is admirably characterised by the profound remark of Mirabeau, "That man will go far; he believes everything he says." But though political fanaticism may, like the same

excess in religion, seek its justification by pleading superabundance of faith, the human heart instinctively revolts against doctrines that lead to such deeds. There are two species of fanatics—those that kill and those that die. The former are abhorred, the latter are blessed and hailed as martyrs. There is in our own blood, freely poured forth for truth, a regenerative virtue which the blood shed by our hand, though in the same holy cause, can never possess. Will posterity, for the sake of a political principle, ever forgive Robespierre the deaths of his best friends—of Camille Desmoulins and his wife, so remorselessly abandoned and sacrificed, lest, by saving them, he should compromise his power, and with it the ideal of humanity towards which he tended?

But, revolting as are even his best qualities, Robespierre still demands justice. Why throw upon him the sole responsibility of the Reign of Terror? The men who overthrew him were more cruel and more guilty. They favoured atheism and profligacy; he was severe in his morals, and religiously inclined. Let it not be forgotten that he risked his popularity and hastened his ruin in order to check the progress of atheism, and cause the recognition of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul. He intended to arrest the progress of bloodshed. During the last months of the terror, he carried on a secret struggle with that fearful Committee of Public Safety, which provided Fouquier Tinville with victims. For six weeks before the 9th of Thermidor, he ceased to attend, or possess any influence over, its deliberations: yet it was during those six weeks that the executions were most active; that his friends the Sainte Amaranthes, the sixty-nine companions of Cécile Renaud, and the sixteen nuns of Compiègne, were sent to the scaffold; that Collot d'Herbois, one of those who worked his ruin, warned Fouquier Tinville to manage so that a hundred and fifty heads at least might fall every day. When these men perceived that it was Robespierre's intention to sacrifice them, they hastened the crisis, and forestalled him. The most active, because the most in danger, was Tallien. There was every motive to lead him to precipitate the outbreak:

his own safety and that of the woman he adored. From the prison where she pined, the beautiful Theresa communicated her own energy to her lover; incessantly urging him to overthrow Robespierre. A few days before the 9th of Thermidor, she found means to write and send him the following letter:—"The administrator of police has just left me: he came to announce that to-morrow I go to the tribunal; that is to say, to the scaffold. How different is this from the dream I had last night: Robespierre was no more, and the prisons were open. . . . . But, thanks to your cowardice, no one in France will soon be found to realise that dream." Tallien answered: "Be as prudent as I shall be courageous, and keep yourself calm."

The 9th Thermidor came: Robespierre was accused of aiming at dictatorship, forbidden to defend himself, outlawed, and on the 10th executed without trial. Twenty-two of his friends accompanied him to the scaffold. The curses of the people, who had never ceased to identify the reign of blood with his name, followed Robespierre to the guillotine. A woman broke through the crowd, clambered up the cart where he sat, and holding herself by one hand whilst she menaced him with the other, passionately exclaimed: "Monster! vomited out by hell itself, thou art punished now. It fills my heart with joy to see thee here." Robespierre roused from his stupor,—he was severely wounded, having attempted to commit suicide,—opened his eyes, and looked at her. "Go, wretch, that thou art!" she continued; "go to the grave: go, and bear along with thee the curse of every wife and mother."

The curse thus passionately pronounced has clung to the name of Robespierre. Had he overthrown the committee instead of the committee overthrowing him, the Reign of Terror would have ceased as soon, and he, though not less guilty, would have left another name. The terrorists knew not what they had done, until the intoxicating joy of the people shewed them that, Robespierre being gone, the tyranny upheld in his name must likewise depart. They prudently entered into the spirit of a reaction it was not in their power

to control, and threw the whole odium of the blood which had been shed on Robespierre and his friends. Although the subsequent history of the revolution offers abundant proof of their inhumanity, their interested assertions have been too readily believed.

The terror ceased at Paris on the fall of Robespierre, because there public opinion prevailed; but its reign continued in many of the provinces. In the town of Valenciennes alone sixty-seven victims perished for religious or political motives, from the 23d of September to the 13th of December 1794. The religious persecutions which Robespierre had sought to check were resumed with unabated vigour. Several nuns of Valenciennes left France in the beginning of the revolution, and established themselves at Mons, eight leagues from the frontier. When Valenciennes was taken by the Austrians, they returned to their native city. It fell once more into the power of the French: the nuns imprudently remained. They were soon taken before the revolutionary tribunal, and asked if they had ever emigrated. They might have escaped, by answering no: but they all preferred truth to life. On their confession of having left the country, they were accordingly condemned and executed. Though thus imperfectly displayed in the provinces, the reaction was very strong in Paris. It manifested itself chiefly in the altered aspect of society.

Never, perhaps, unless at the death of Louis XIV., had the French social world undergone such transitions as those which were figured by the political struggle of '89, the gloomy terror, and the disorderly reaction of Thermidor. According to Madame de Staël, French society remained in all its splendour from 1788 to 1791. The political discussions, which had not yet been changed into bitter quarrels and heart-burning animosities, gave this brilliant world an interest hitherto unknown. Everything was full of animation and hope. As the revolution progressed, party-spirit ran high, aristocratic society split into faction, and was broken for ever by the tide of emigration. Women had a great share in this important and ill-advised movement. The aristocratic ladies, who were

the most vehement philosophers and liberal in theory, could not endure the actual progress of equality and loss of privilege by which it was accompanied. They urged their husbands, brothers, and lovers, to leave a country which so little understood its interests as to contemn its ancient nobility. When their friends demurred and represented the impolicy of such a step, the women sent them distaffs, with the contemptuous intimation that these were the only arms fit for them.

Stung by these reproaches the young nobles left the land *en masse*. The women, little apprehensive of danger, remained behind. Those who tarried too long perished on the scaffold; others, more fortunate, made their escape from the country, and filled the little court of the exiled princes with their intrigues and repinings. One old countess, addressing a circle of nobles, observed with bitter and vindictive triumph: "Messieurs, you richly deserve what has happened to you. *I* foretold the ruin of the nobility from the moment I saw you abandoning women like us for girls of the third estate." The emigration favoured the revolutionary spirit in every sense; it gave an access of importance and power to commoners, and threw the influence hitherto wielded by aristocratic ladies into the hands of women of that "third estate" so much contemned by the old countess. Though sadly reluctant to leave her beloved Paris, Madame de Staël departed at length for Coppet. Madame de Genlis, Madame de Condorcet, Madame de Coigny, Madame Roland, Lucile Desmoulins, and Mademoiselle Caudeille, successively possessed the power, now both political and social, which was so soon to pass away from their sex. The discredit which gradually fell on the Orleans party compelled Madame de Genlis to seek refuge with her pupils in the army of Dumouriez on the frontiers. Her husband, who had of late affected to call her "Madame Livre," remained behind, and perished with the Girondists. All the tact, address, and ambition of Madame de Genlis seconded the intriguing Dumouriez in the attempted treason by which that general sought to give to the young Duke of Chartres the crown he was not to obtain until thirty-seven years had elapsed.

When the treason of Dumouriez was discovered, he fled in haste, accompanied by the prince. Madame de Genlis and the young princes found a refuge in Switzerland. They were after some time compelled to separate. Madame de Genlis wandered alone over all Europe, persecuted by the emigrated royalists, who abhorred her very name. She returned to France under the consulship of Napoleon, with a temper no little embittered by disappointed ambition; but with her intellect as active as ever. She wrote a few novels highly successful at the time; well-nigh forgotten now.

The rule of Mesdames de Coigny and de Condorcet proved as transient. Madame Roland and Lucile Desmoulins paid with their blood their brief political sway. Mademoiselle Candeille, a beautiful and accomplished actress, closely connected with the Girondist leaders, and with Dumouriez, escaped the general proscription; though she was coarsely, and even ferociously, assailed by Marat, in his *Ami du Peuple*. But after, and even before the death of Lucile Desmoulins, there was, properly speaking, no social world for woman to govern. Paris seemed transformed. Universal distrust checked all freedom of intercourse. No visits were paid or received. The theatres flourished, and were always full, precisely because society was no more. Men took refuge from the danger which surrounded every home, in a place of public resort where none were bound to speak. The individuals who had belonged to the elegant society of the old régime, and who still remained in France, lived in a state of perpetual apprehension. The most extraordinary concessions were daily made to fear. The once pretty Madame du Marchais, now Madame d'Angivilliers, and advanced in years, resided at Versailles. In order not to be inscribed on the list of the *suspects*, she made a solemn offering to the popular society of Versailles of a splendid bust of Marat. She thus passed safely through the Reign of Terror. Fear often led to compliance more degrading still. The women of Lyons did not blush to wear earrings and brooches made in the shape of a guillotine; little guillotines were given to children as toys to play with. One insane individual, in his

fervent admiration for the instrument of death, offered to settle a pension upon it. It was in the midst of this universal dread, when the names of the inhabitants of every house were written on the doorway, in order that the tyrants might know where to find their victims; when women were publicly chastised by the poissardes for refusing to wear the tricolor cockade, or not paying adoration to the manes of Marat; when the kings and queens of playing cards were effaced as dangerous to republican institutions; when the Place Vendôme, inhabited by financiers, was depopulated, and on every hotel of the aristocratic faubourg Saint-Germain might be read the words "National Property;" it was then that the people were ordered to rejoice, and hold a great fraternal banquet in the streets of Paris. Gaily ornamented tables were spread out before each door. Every one brought down his fare, and joined it to that of his neighbour. The most uneasy endeavoured to look delighted. One young girl, wearied of life, took the opportunity, at this fraternal banquet, to cry out "Vive le Roi!"

Abject fear was not the only feature of these times. There was also heroism as great and pure as has ever been recorded in history. A patriotic enthusiasm, which even the guillotine could not subdue, had seized on the whole nation at the approach of the foe. Two hundred and fifty-eight forges stood in Paris. Women sewed tents and coats for the soldiers; the children scraped lint. The men dug up their cellars for saltpetre. Their wives carried up the earth, and threw it in heaps before the doors of their houses. The cry of "The land is in danger!" had not been uttered or heard in vain.

It was, however, on the frontiers that most heroism was displayed. There women fought side by side with their husbands; not for glory, but to guard the sacredness of their home and native soil. The two sisters Fernig rank amongst the most remarkable and devoted of these heroines. Their father, a private gentleman of property, headed a troop of volunteers. His two eldest daughters, Félicité and Théophile resolved to assume male attire, and watch privately over the

safety of their parent. They did so for a long time unsuspected, but they were at length detected by General Beurnonville, who reported their heroism to the Convention. From that time they distinguished themselves by their daring valour in almost every engagement that took place. Félicité, at the risk of her life, once delivered from the hands of the enemy a young and wounded officer named Vanderwalen. He had seen her for a few moments only; but, filled with gratitude and love, he looked for her throughout all Germany, where she had followed Dumouriez in his flight. He found her at length in Denmark, married her, and brought her to Brussels, where she lived with him and her sister. Théophile did not marry, and died young. "She has left," observes an eminent judge of such matters, "poems full of manly heroism and womanly feeling, and well worthy of accompanying her name to immortality."

Whilst women thus shed their blood like men on the frontiers of the land, they sought to oppose their moral influence to the progress of atheism within. This was the time of the worship of the Goddess of Reason. Beautiful courtesans, voluptuously attired, were led in triumph to the principal churches, placed on the altars, and exposed to the supposed adoration of the crowd. The women always shrank with horror from these impious saturnalia. It was only by threats that Chaumette could induce Mademoiselle Maillard, the actress, to take the part of Goddess of Reason in the cathedral of Notre Dame. Momoro compelled his handsome wife to receive the same degrading honours in Saint-Sulpice, where she is said to have fainted away with shame. A young girl of sixteen died with grief and horror at the impieties in which she had been compelled to participate. It is not without reason that the Church has bestowed upon woman the name of "the devout sex." There is a faith in her soul, over which reasoning, or the specious sophistry too often called such, has no power. She believes because it is in her nature to look up to higher things than this world can give; and she neither asks nor needs any proof beyond that in her own heart

to tell her that God and providence are not idle words of human invention. This moral and religious influence of woman considerably checked the progress of atheism and materialism in France. No inquisition and no laws could prevent religious mothers from rearing up their children in the faith of God and the contempt of man's authority.

It was chiefly to the religious principles he professed that Robespierre owed the little circle of admiring women whom the atheistic Hébert and Chaumette ironically termed "the devotees of Robespierre." These ladies, who were often religious royalists, attached themselves to him with a sort of passion. Robespierre liked the society of elegant women. He was a man of cultivated manners, and shrank from the vulgarity affected by the other terrorists. He often promised his cortège of female admirers to re-establish freedom of conscience and the supremacy of religious opinions. The fête of the Supreme Being was but a consequence of his principles. This solemn act has been blamed and ridiculed; it is difficult to see why. Atheism had been formally established. The sacred name of the Divinity had been impiously blasphemed in the churches dedicated to His worship; schoolmasters had even been forbidden to pronounce it before their pupils. The inscription, "Death is Eternal Sleep!" had been engraved over the entrance of every cemetery. Relatives could not bury their dead with the customary ceremonies, but were compelled to see them thrown into the earth with indecent familiarity and haste. The fanaticism which was displayed in the promulgation of atheism was as unrelenting as any which ever disgraced the quarrels of Christian sects. It was this stain that Robespierre wished to efface from the cause of the revolution; with which it must not be confounded. The fête of the "Etre Suprême" exasperated the terrorists, and was hailed throughout France as the coming of a new era. The uninterrupted bloodshed by which it was followed effaced this impression. Few care to know that of that blood at least Robespierre was innocent: his name has gone down to posterity as the type of all the evil passions of democracy. Not-

withstanding the discrepancy between his principles and the deeds he silently suffered to be enacted, the devotees of Robespierre remained faithful to him and to his cause. Several sacrificed their fortunes and their connexions to their attachment. One lady expiated her friendship for him by a tedious captivity.

Women were, however, generally dissatisfied with the new part given them in society by the revolution. They had little anticipated being reduced to comparative insignificance by the political action of men. Such, however, was now the case. "What," very justly asked Olympe de Gouges of the women of her time, "what are the advantages you have derived from the revolution? Slights and contempts more plainly displayed." It was thus; women had lost their old influence, and they had obtained nothing in return. Fierce political passions had arisen, strangely altering national manners. Elegance and chivalrous respect for ladies had vanished with the old aristocracy. The republican severity that the new rulers of France wished to introduce threatened to curtail still further female privileges. Olympe de Gouges boldly asked for equality of the sexes: she made few proselytes, and was covered with ridicule.

It is often the fate of a good cause to suffer from the premature efforts made in its favour. That of woman may rank among the rest. It would be difficult to assert that the actual position of woman is what it ought to be: she is neither wholly independent, nor yet wholly protected. Political equality, granted to her in remote ages, amidst barbarous nations, and still existing in many savage tribes, is denied her in civilised society. Though often exposed to poverty and want, she is shut out from the wide field of exertion open to man. It is true she is no longer the mere domestic drudge she was once: she has risen in intellect and in power, and a lady's-maid is now more learned than many a princess of yore. There is no reason to suppose that women will not continue to progress with society itself. If they do not, it will be their own fault. When they have won their place, they will have it

without effort, and by the natural course of events. Olympe de Gouges and her partisans were too impatient: they attempted to seize at once on that which time alone could bestow: they sought, more imprudently still, to settle how the great change should take place, and to give laws to futurity. If there is one folly beyond all others in legislators, reformers, and theorists, it is the attempt to fasten their own ideas of truth and right on their descendants. The leading principle, when it happens to be a true one, posterity generally retains; but the form according to which that principle is promulgated it seldom or never adopts, because it is the form of a past age unsuited to present wisdom. Putting it aside, with a kindly smile at bygone presumption, posterity just chooses a path of its own.

Such were a few amongst the reasons which caused the failure of Olympe de Gouges. Had she been more gifted, she might have thrown a greater charm over her cause; she could not have rendered it more successful. Time must do its own work. Women far inferior to Olympe took up the same strain when she was gone. A handsome actress, named Rose Lacombe, whom Chaumette called "dangerous and eloquent," soon headed the female clubs founded by Olympe de Gouges. Eloquent, but cynical in her language, Rose Lacombe acquired great ascendency over the degraded women who made insurrections, and disgraced the Convention by the cries and tumult they constantly raised during its sittings. Though insolent and tyrannical to a singular excess, Rose Lacombe was not cruel: she often interceded for victims; but her power was limited, as may be concluded from the fact that two of her lovers were guillotined. When the female clubs were closed, in 1793, she sank into complete obscurity. The power of such women could not endure beyond the excesses from which it had arisen. It disappeared when the Reign of Terror vanished, and society resumed its rights.

When the first feeling of astonishment created by the 9th of Thermidor had subsided, French gaiety, which had prevailed in the prisons in spite of the guillotine, now trifled as recklessly

over the gloomy past. The share which Madame Tallien had had in the fall of Robespierre was soon known and magnified: the enthusiasm felt for her displayed itself in the theatres, where she frequently appeared, by loud bursts of applause. She became the queen of Paris, and ruled gracefully over the most promiscuous society France had yet witnessed. Men of the lowest class, enriched by lucky speculations, rose into sudden importance; fervent royalists, who had vanished whilst the guillotine held sway, now suddenly came forth, as if from underground. A good citizen had a valuable cook, an amnesty is proclaimed, and he suddenly discovers that he has been attended by a marchioness in disguise, who, to his infinite regret, now gives him warning; ladies who had turned shepherdesses for safety's sake, fearful lest they should be detected by the whiteness of their hands, resume their rank and aristocratic tone: disdaining not, however, to seek for influence through republican representatives of the people, who show themselves nothing loath to be sued by handsome *ci-devants*. The grave old hotels of the Faubourg Saint-Germain slowly begin to fill; finance reigns in the Chaussée d'Antin. The dead of the Reign of Terror are scarcely cold in their unanointed graves, when their friends give balls, at which none but near relatives of victims can dance. These "bals des victimes" have great success. The poor are starving, but the theatres thrive, and gaming-tables are crowded in rich saloons. Society is so imperfectly re-established, that no private balls are given: they are all public, and to these even the most exclusive must go. Divorce has become frequent and easy. Women change their names with wonderful rapidity: attired in a voluptuous Grecian costume, with a red shawl, fashionable since the red chemise of Charlotte Corday, and hair cropped close "à la sacrifiée," they throng the gardens of the Tuileries. A freedom and familiarity of manner, unknown to the old régime, mark this new world: the language itself is altered: the ear has become two much accustomed to the style of the Halles. Licence is as strong as of old, but it is far more gross and offensive: profligate books abound. The revolutionary fever

has subsided: blood is no longer shed, but corruption prevails: the nation has not benefited much by the change.

It is over this world the beautiful Madame Tallien reigns. She is idolised by the young men, with hair plaited, and turned up à la victime, green cravat, and crape bound round the arm, who, with stout sticks in their hands, fill the Palais Royal, singing the "Reveil du Peuple:" these pass by the various names of Merveilleux, Incroyables, Muscadins, or Jeunesse Dorée of Fréron. Fréron, once the most sanguinary of Terrorists, is now suddenly transformed into a vehement reactionary: the mission of this "golden youth" is to insult and oppress every gloomy-looking Terrorist he may meet in the street. Thus the victims of tyranny understand freedom when their turn is come. Hidden partisans of the Girondists come forward every day: Louvet, now married to his Lodoïska, reappears in the Convention; but it is Tallien and the Thermidoriens who reign supreme. The old conventionalists who have aided in the overthrow of Robespierre begin to sigh, and think they might have done better.

Madame Tallien employed all her tact in mollifying these subdued Mountaineers: "You are so good, with all your abruptness of manner," she soothingly observed to stern Legendre. "Your heart is so generous," she said to Merlin de Thionville. "You have become the Achilles of honest people," was the remark the siren addressed to the handsome and profligate Barras: ex-noble and ex-terrorist, now her devoted admirer, never calling her but Aspasia, and not unwilling, it is said, to play the part of Pericles.

But these gentle arts did not succeed equally well with all. Some of the Terrorists consented to appear in Madame Tallien's drawing-room, and mingle with the fashionable assemblage gathered there; but many held sternly aloof from the woman whom they contemptuously called the Cabarrus, and attacked her in the Convention itself. Tallien was at length obliged to come forward to justify her, and publicly acknowledge her for his wife. In society the defence of Madame Tallien was warmly taken up by the Thermidorien army of

young men formed under her auspices and those of her friend Josephine de Beauharnais. This army of Muscadins amounted to two or three thousand; the young men who refused to join it were inevitably disgraced with all the women. Their exploits were at first confined to the breaking of Marat's busts in the public places; increasing in boldness, they compelled the Jacobins to disperse, and shut up their famous club. The keys were brought to Madame Tallien, who, shewing them in triumph to her friends, laughingly said, "You see it was not so difficult."

The generous and humane influence of Madame Tallien prevented the Parisian reaction from taking a sanguinary form; but in the provinces, where her power did not extend, it assumed an aspect almost as revolting as that of the Reign of Terror. Terrorists were daily assassinated in the streets of Lyons: seventy prisoners were in one day massacred or burned in their prison: eighty perished at Marseilles. Similar scenes disgraced almost every town which had suffered under the previous tyranny. Societies known as the "Children of the Sun," or "Companies of Jesus," were organised throughout the south, for the purpose of plundering and killing the foes before whom all had cowered in the days of their power.

As events progressed, the influence and popularity of Madame Tallien somewhat subsided. Tallien, leaving her in Paris, proceeded to Brittany, and distinguished himself by his cruelty in the tragedy of Quiberon. "Oh, why was I not there!" exclaimed Madame Tallien, in despair at what her husband had done: she felt and knew that Tallien, harsh as he was, could never have resisted her entreaties.

The revolution was then in the last convulsions of its brief existence. Royalist conspiracies and ultra-democratic movements marked the last years of its being; the government became weak and corrupt: its vigour and earnestness seemed gone with the Jacobins. Whatever may have been their errors or their crimes, they were, at least, the men of the revolution. When they disappear from the scene, events seem to become insignificant and degraded, like the men at

the head of affairs, until Bonaparte appears to open the history of a new era. Barras, voluptuous, insolent, and despotic, one of the five directors who, since 1795, governed France, held a sort of court in the Luxembourg; another director, Laréveillère Lépeaux, attempted to establish a deistic faith, called Théophilanthropia, of which the principal observances were offerings of flowers to the Divinity; a third director, Neufchateau, presided, with his wife, over a little literary circle. The few individuals who remained of the old society looked on this new state of things with disgust. Even they were not what they once had been. Old Madame d'Angivilliers, attired in fashions thirty years old, gathered a few literary friends around her, and gave two dinners a week—one to her profane acquaintances, and the other to her confessor—in a close room filled with flowers and essences, by which the guests were almost stifled. These little absurdities, joined to others not mentioned here, left the native goodness of her heart undisturbed. It was discovered at her death that she maintained no less than thirty-four families of Versailles.

The only woman who could in reality represent the elegance and good-breeding of the past, united to the daring genius of the new era, was Madame de Staël. As soon as events permitted her, she left Coppet; where, during the whole time of the Reign of Terror, she only wrote one work: an eloquent and unavailing defence of Marie Antoinette. She came to Paris, and entered with ardour into the political contests of the times. Her saloon was thronged by the eminent men of every party; two men partly owed their elevation to her influence: Talleyrand and Benjamin Constant. The ambition of Madame de Staël was worthy of her generous character. She wished to consolidate the republican government by conciliating the parties at variance, and inducing them to act in concert. In this womanly task she unhappily failed. The royalists would yield none of their hopes for the future; the republicans scorned to profess the least repentance for the past; the directors remained aloof;

the so-called moderates shewed themselves as irreconcilable as the rest. Whilst all parties thus persisted in their obstinacy Bonaparte stepped forward, seized on the power, and crushed them, and the freedom which they had purchased with years of blood, but knew not how to preserve or defend.

Next to intellectual and independent men, Bonaparte detested intellectual and independent women. He liked talent, but only such talent as he could control. Madame de Staël soon became odious to him. He especially resented the freedom of discussion, which she loved herself, and encouraged in all those who came near her. He wanted to consider literature and art as abstract principles, and felt irritated to perceive their close connexion with every question of the day. The attempt he made to silence Madame de Staël shews how imperfectly Napoleon understood her high and independent character. "What does she want?" he impatiently observed to one of her friends; "will she have the two millions the state owes to her father?" "The question is not, what I want," said Madame de Staël, when this was repeated to her, "but what I think." Their mutual enmity soon rose high. Napoleon compelled Madame de Staël to leave Paris and Parisian society, which she idolised; but he could not subdue her spirit; and in that long, and for him disgraceful struggle, it was still the woman who triumphed. In the courts and select society of every land of her exile Madame de Staël carried her resentment with her. Everywhere she eloquently declaimed against the despotism of Napoleon, or mercilessly ridiculed the theatrical pageantry of his court. There were few important epochs in his reign, when the emperor was not made to feel the power and sarcasms of the woman of genius whom he had so unjustly and imprudently contemned.

With this woman, the greatest and most gifted in intellect her sex has yet produced, closed the social and political power of women in France during the eighteenth century. Let us look back and see the part they enacted during that ever-

memorable age. Madame du Maine and the Cellamare conspiracy, voluptuous Madame de la Verrue, and intriguing Madame de Tencin, reappear before us with the profligate days of the regency: they add to its deep corruption: whilst chastened by penitence, sorrowful Mademoiselle Aïssé dies, silently asserting, though she knows it not, the undying strength of woman's faith and purity. The name of learned Madame du Chatelet remains associated with that of Voltaire and his cold philosophy. Madame de la Popelinière, graceful and elegant as she is, is only the protectress of that degraded art which suits a degraded age, when four sisters became the mistresses of a king. The haughty favourite, Madame de Pompadour, has no power beyond that political power she wrings from her lover. The philosophic Madame d'Epinay; the good-natured Madame Geoffrin; Madame du Deffand, selfish, caustic, and ennuyée; and impassioned Mademoiselle Lespinasse, with so much that is generous and true in her erring nature, rule society under Louis XV. The abandoned old king dies; Louis XVI., young, pure, and weak, ascends the throne to reap the thorns his grandfather has sown. Women still govern society: Marie Antoinette, the gay and imprudent queen, the clever and supple Madame de Genlis, Madame Necker, sedate and grave, have their day. But this empty world is passing fast away. The storm which has gathered through centuries breaks forth. In that new contest, destined to ruin her power, woman still takes an active part. She rules parties, defends a monarchy with Marie Antoinette, or founds a republic with Madame Roland. We behold her avenging outraged humanity under the form of Charlotte Corday; teaching men how to suffer and die in every prison and on every scaffold; overthrowing the whole fabric of tyranny with the generous Madame Tallien, and defending the freedom of thought with the gifted daughter of Necker.

Profligacy, scepticism, daring wit, struggles of monarch and people, terror and reaction, would indeed have existed without her; but they could not have been what they are

now in the history of that age, had woman remained inactive and apart. If she did not do more good, let it be remembered that her power was conditional: it was confined within fixed limits, and submissive to that spirit of the times which both men and women obeyed. Yet it is sad to reflect how much that could have been effected was left undone. Morals might have been preserved more pure, and their purity is woman's own peculiar care; faith need not have fallen so low; a spirit of charity and peace might have been diffused instead of one of bitterness and strife. The passionate impulse which precipitated France in her career was partly owing to women: had they tempered instead of accelerated the fever of the day, so many dark and mournful pages need not have been found in the history of their country. As it was, their part was still great and striking. They gave more grace to wit, more daring to philosophy, more generosity to political contests, and more heroism to defeat and death. For those who know how to look beyond the mere surface of history, the action of woman in France during the eighteenth century will not soon be forgotten. She appears in that age —the most remarkable since that of the Reformation—connected with every important question. We behold her giving a stronger impulse to literature, aiding the development of philosophy and thought; and, like man, earnestly seeking, through all the mists and errors of human knowledge, to solve the great social and political problems which still agitate us in our day: the legacy of the past to the future.

THE END.

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